

**Sermon: 2019/11/17 (23rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - Isaiah 65:17-25; Canticle 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; & Luke 21:5-19\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Have the materials to make a "heavenly Jerusalem" ready; paper-template, glue, scissors, string, etc. Begin construction immediately.]

Do you remember that, last week, I told you (again) about how the Babylonians destroyed what was left of David's kingdom of Israel?  
How they burned down Jerusalem and its Temple?

Well, God sent a special messenger - called a, "prophet" - his name was Isaiah - to speak some comfortable words of reassurance to the Israelites:  
And Isaiah told them to "*Cheer up!* Because God wasn't finished. That God wasn't a God of endings but of 'new' beginnings.  
That though *old* Jerusalem was, yes, in ruins; a *better* one was going to be built. And he wasn't referring to the modern city (of Jerusalem) which we can visit today: oh no!  
There's always trouble there. And pollution and crime and cats - like in McMinnville.  
This "*better*" Jerusalem was one that *God* was going to build!  
Yes, He personally.  
And He would lower it to earth from Heaven himself:  
[Lower model slowly over forearm on its string to the "earth."]

This would be a *perfect(!)* city made of precious stones where *everyone* (who loves Jesus) can live together - even lambs and wolves(!) - in peace, permanently.  
*How exciting!*  
I hope I get to see it.  
Don't you?

Let's pray:  
Lord God, ...

[Dismiss children.]

Only moments way from the agony of His crucifixion (in Jerusalem), we just heard these words (in *Luke 21*):  
"The time is near!" said Jesus, to the Apostles.  
"...[In your lifetimes you're going to] hear of wars and insurrections, [but] do not be terrified; for these things *must* take place first, but the end will *not* follow immediately."

And guess what?

The incarnated, *omniscient* (all-knowing) Creator was *exactly* right:

After all, that speech; that teaching was given almost two, whole *thousand* years ago, and, "lo and behold," the end didn't follow 'immediately'; and, evidently, still has not yet arrived, thanks be to God.

And those 'wars and insurrections' He referenced have been *great* and terrible in number, and some of them came very close indeed to Hell-on-earth, but, eventually, *mercifully*, they "fizzled" out:

Jesus, we see, hasn't returned.

The First World War, which was commemorated just last week, was known, *tragically*, at the time as, "The War to End All Wars," yet it proved, of course, *nothing* of the sort.

In fact, it only laid the bitter groundwork for an equally destructive series of conflicts over the subsequent decades, culminating of course, in the so-called *Cold War*, where various "*super-powers*," in some grand, mad, international "Mexican Standoff" armed themselves to the teeth with scores of world-*ending* nuclear rockets, enough to make Armageddon look quaint, and yet still we did not tumble over into the Abyss. [Pause.]

You know, there is no way, not really, to *protect* oneself from (atomic) "Mutually-Assured-Destruction;"

there is no way, not really, to properly guard against suddenly being vaporised by a blinding, radioactive fireball from the sky; *or* the subsequent poisonous fallout.

Yet, driving around Warren County I do see, here and there, concrete bomb-shelters; *bunkers* from the Mid-Century.

There is at least one visible from the highway through Woodbury:

it is dug into the side of a small hill.

Tall weeds have grown up around the entrance, which stands open, dark and empty.

Now, the house that is immediately behind it - belonging, I presume to the owner - is modest (in size).

You might even say, euphemistically, it was "rustic" looking.

In need of some...renovation.

I certainly don't want to be disparaging.

Some (with different tastes) might say it's is quaint; a "fixer-upper."

But I have wondered what it cost the person to build: the bunker, that is.

I wonder what he spent on what is now a museum relic, and what he could have used that money on instead:

college tuition for his kids...

better health insurance.

I don't know - we can only speculate.

*Maybe* he was a handy, thrifty "do-it-yourself-er" and was able to construct it for

very little.

But *whatever* sum of money he "poured" into making that fortified hole-in-the-ground, it was money wasted.

And not just because, *hallelujah(!)*, the bombs never fell, but because even if they had it wouldn't have afforded him any safety whatsoever:

The weapons in question burn hotter than the sun.

They turn rock to glass.

People to ash.

Summer to winter - winters of hundreds of years in length.

Who can store enough rice and beans to survive an artificially induced "Global Cooling" that would last for *multiple* generations?

Yet "prepping" - as it is known - did not go out of fashion when the (Berlin) Wall came down.

Yes, admittedly, it is only the preserve of a vanishingly small minority.

But the rest of us aren't immune to tumbling into a similar "trap" -

of paranoia;

of anxiety about current affairs;

of fearing for the future;

of hoarding.

Which is why Jesus warned the Twelve "'not to prepare your defence in advance"' against the 'dreadful portents' of Judgment Day;

against the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' as Shakespeare has Prince Hamlet say in that often quoted line.

Jesus did *not* mean just live with (care-free) abandon.

He did *not* say throw all caution to the wind and make no provision for one's children or grandchildren.

But neither is "Live for the present" one of Jesus' mottos.

It isn't His new "Golden Rule."

For the "now" is a fickle "mistress" as much as tomorrow is an unknown country.

Rather, Jesus urges His friends to focus on personal 'endurance'.

That is to say, for us to *endure* in doing those things He expects of those individuals who claim to follow Him.

Being busy.

Being busy building not bunkers - bunkers of selfishness; bunkers of vanity; but busy building the Kingdom of God - *as far as that is possible* in the Fallen, broken, *comprised* situation that we find all round us.

To an extent, that *might* mean investing in *actual* buildings such as this - to "adorn" it with 'beautiful stones' - or their modern-day equivalent, at least - 'and gifts dedicated to God', seeing that His people do need somewhere to gather and worship and study His (inspired) Scriptures; and to do so with the understanding

that though He is *always* present with us, we're helped to sense His awesomeness by a carefully crafted aesthetic that points us toward Him.

But, at the same time, we must be mindful of how coming to such a place as this is not so as to *hide* from atheists;

to *hide* from the doubters and the sceptics.

Rather, it is to come together to be *resourced* to reach them with the Gospel that "Jesus saves," and to be inspired 'in doing what is right.'

The Church, then; St. Matthew's isn't a bunker... *but a barracks*.

A "barracks" where we learn and train to be Christ's disciples.

It is for this reason that Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, says: 'keep away from believers who are living in idleness'.

'[I]dleness' has no place in the barracks.

'[I]delness' is the very *last* thing that you'd expect to find if you visited the Airforce base down at Tullahoma, right?

Imagine walking through the gate and seeing the pilots not in the flying-simulator or running laps, or learning navigation and physics, but sitting around, *all* of them, playing cards and watching Netflix or Disney+;

slippers on their feet, yawning and napping.

And imagine that that's all that they did!

You would come to worry a great deal about national security, wouldn't you?

Perhaps, alarmed, you would even sign up yourself.

To "do your part."

To make a difference.

Well, that's our calling - as *Christians*.

To not be 'mere busybodies' - "sniping" from the sidelines, picking holes and passing judgment on our brothers and sisters in the Faith, but to be ourselves in the "foxhole" of *actively* sharing and demonstrating our love for the Savior and our belief in the eternal life He promises to those who "endure" until He reigns in glory or we breathe our last: whatever comes first.

Let's take a moment to reflect.