

Advent Devotional December 16, 2023

Scripture

Matthew 24:1-14

1 As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 Then he asked them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: 8 all this is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

9 "Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. 10 Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

Devotion

The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy '13

I have had the privilege of traveling to many countries and I love doing so. One of the places I had the opportunity to visit and will always cherish was my time in Israel and specifically, the time I spent in Jerusalem. The experience of visiting many of the places Jesus walked, prayed, taught, was crucified, and resurrected from the dead, was life changing. I remember walking up the winding road to the Mount of Olives, and passing by a man with his donkey. That experience felt like I had been transported back to biblical times. Standing on the Mount of Olives, the place where, according to Luke 22:29, Jesus went to pray, to pour his heart out to God, was a surreal and sacred experience.

After reading today's devotional passage, I closed my eyes and began to reminisce about some of the things I saw while standing on the Mount of Olives. I remember the opulence and majesty of the Temple Mount; I remember the perfect imperfection of the centuries-old walls surrounding the Old City; and I remember being overwhelmed and comforted as I walked into the Chapel of the Ascension, and the Spirit of God enveloped and surrounded me. Truly, the presence of the Lord was in that place and on that mountain.

As my attention returns to today's devotional scripture passage, I am not surprised by the disciples' curiosity about when the end time will come. Although this is a familiar passage, my spirit is troubled by the fact that many of the events Jesus described as foreshadowing the end of days—false prophets, people betraying and hating one another, falling away (from the church), increasing lawlessness, love growing cold, wars and rumors of wars—all of these signs are evident as I write.

Jesus speaks of these end-time signs and that his return is at hand, and he also shared the good news: the kingdom of God will be proclaimed throughout the world. That's the message of Advent. Even though life as we know it is and can be unsure, unsettling, and tenuous, as we wait for the next moment, day, month, or year, we are not without hope because we have the assurance that God is with us and will come again. So, we wait with expectation, surrounded by the Holy Spirit, much like I was while in Jerusalem, with the comfort, peace, and faithful promises of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Faithful and gracious, God, we place all of our hope and trust in you as we move, breathe, and have our very being, for you have promised that despite everything that life may present, you are with us, and the kingdom of God shall be proclaimed. Today, we proclaim boldly, in and through Jesus Christ, that you have overcome all of the uncertainty, sin, and calamities of this world. Amen.