

Sunday, November 16, 2025

The Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae

on

Luke 21:5-19

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Opportunity to testify

In my twenties—before I married at thirty-one and moved to the United States—my life in Korea was full of fearless challenges and dynamic adventures. I traveled widely across Asia, Africa, and Europe, meeting people whose lives and faith humbled and transformed me. They became some of the most important teachers I have ever had.

Among the encounters I will never forget were the children I met in remote Kenyan villages. They had no clean water for drinking or washing, and each day they walked barefoot for more than an hour to fetch water. Their clothes were torn and shabby, yet their smiles were bright, and they stretched out their hands to greet a stranger. I can still hear—twenty-five years later—the hymns we sang together. Their voices carried a purity and strength that came from a faith not sheltered by comfort, but refined by hardship.

Another unforgettable encounter was with young North Korean defectors I met in China. They lived in hiding, risking their lives every day. But their faith—fervent, clear, and unashamed—revealed a dimension of the gospel I could never have understood from my own life of safety and abundance. Through them, I learned a depth of prayer born not from habit, but from desperation and hope intertwined.

And even in the United States, God continued to reveal this deeper current of faith. While serving as a hospital chaplain, I met a young woman whose frail body was limp and weak, yet whose eyes held a piercing strength. Her voice, filled with unwavering conviction, spoke of her desire and calling to dedicate her life to the gospel. Her soul refused to be caged by her failing flesh. In her, I sensed a force far beyond human will. She embodied Jesus' words in today's Gospel:

"This will give you an opportunity to testify."

These are the witnesses Jesus speaks of—people whose faith shines not because life is easy, but precisely because life is hard.

Today's readings confront us with the uncomfortable truth that the gospel is not proven by success, prosperity, or outward blessing. As Jesus warns, even the most beautiful stones, the finest gifts, and the grandest temples will crumble. The things that impress our eyes will not last. What matters most is invisible, eternal, and unshakeable.

Some churches emphasize testifying to the gospel through success. But if worldly success is evidence of the gospel, what distinguishes Christianity from superstition or a belief in magic? What meaning would Jesus' teaching have—*"Those who seek to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it"*?

Malachi reminds us that a day is coming when all that is arrogant and evil will be burned like stubble—but for those who revere God's name, *"the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."* Not success, not comfort—but righteousness and healing.

In Luke, Jesus speaks of wars, rebellions, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences—not as signs that God has abandoned us, but as the very moments when His followers must stand firm. *"Do not be terrified,"* Jesus says. *"This will give you an opportunity to testify."* Not just in times of peace, not in seasons of comfort, but in moments of confusion, fear, and threat.

Jesus does not say, *"You will be loved by all because of me."* He says, *"You will be hated because of my name."* Yet He promises—not safety, but life. *"By your endurance you will gain your souls."*

This is the witness that shines through Scripture. Job testifies to God even as everything is taken from him. Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord even when the fig tree withers, the vines fail, the fields yield no food, and the stalls stand empty. True testimony is not born of abundance but of endurance.

George MacDonald once wrote, *"The Son of God suffered unto death, not that we might be spared suffering, but that our suffering might be like His."* If our suffering becomes united to the Lord's suffering, then it is never meaningless. The boat we sail—even in stormy waters—is the boat Christ enters.

The gospel's light shines brightest in darkness. Its hope is most necessary when circumstances feel most desperate. If the path you walk now seems darker, lonelier, or more precarious than ever, Scripture teaches that this is not a sign of God's absence but often the very space where grace becomes most visible. When the foundations around us shake, when the things we trusted begin to crumble, God invites us to discover the one foundation that cannot be moved.

This is why Jesus tells us not to be afraid when we hear of wars or disasters, or even when we face opposition for His name. These are not the moments when faith collapses — these are the moments when faith stands up. They become the sacred ground where our testimony is forged. When our strength falters, His strength is revealed. When our own light dims, the light of Christ rises like the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings.

And when we endure — not through perfection, not through heroic power, but simply by refusing to let go of the One who holds us — then our lives become living testimonies. We become, like Job and Habakkuk, people who praise God not because everything is going well, but even when nothing is. We become people who, in the words of Paul, *"do not grow weary in doing what is right,"* even when rightness feels costly.

This is the mystery of the gospel: that Christ meets us most intimately in the very places we least wish to be. Our suffering, joined to His suffering, becomes a place of communion. Our perseverance becomes a quiet but powerful proclamation that Christ is Lord, even here, even now, even in this.

When your own road feels steep, when your heart feels tired, when the future feels uncertain — remember that this may be the very moment when Christ is calling you to testify. Not with grand

speeches, but with the simple, steady witness of living faithfully, loving generously, and trusting deeply. This is the testimony that changes lives. This is the testimony that transforms the world. This is the testimony Jesus promises will not be in vain.

So today, I bless and celebrate your life—not because it is free of struggle, but because your struggles, lived in faith, reveal the power of the gospel. May your stories, your scars, your perseverance, and your joy—all testify with your whole being to the One who promises that not a hair of your head will perish. And may you feel His hand most clearly when the path grows darkest.
