

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is in the Temple and the crowds are admiring its beauty. Just to make everyone is on the same page, the Temple was not "just another temple" – it was the center of the Jewish world – it was THE Temple and it was stunning... Stunning and HUGE. The outer court is said to have held 400,000 people. Constructed by Herod, the Temple was said to be imposing and impressive.

The previous verses of the Gospel of Luke just shared the story of the faithful woman, widowed and impoverished, who threw her whole life into the Temple treasury. The Temple meant that much to the people.

But the disciples with Jesus aren't just admiring the Temple. They're speaking about it – engaging with each other about its costly stones and votive offerings.

But Jesus doesn't talk about how the Temple is an homage to God, or how important it is as a worship space – he speaks frankly, and probably offensively to those around him, about the Temple's inevitable destruction. Not a stone will be left on another stone – the Temple will be leveled.

Imagine that – think of a building that is the center of your world, of the larger community, that is both symbolic and imposing – now imagine that you are told it will be obliterated. It's hard to draw a current-day comparison. The Parliament buildings here in Ottawa? What if tomorrow they were destroyed in a disaster or an attack. How would you feel?

Imagine how the people of New York felt about the destruction of the Twin Towers. How one day it was the icon of the City, the center of their world and then it was gone the next.

That's the magnitude of what the disciples are imagining. The center of their world destroyed – not a stone left on another stone.

But the disciples. They're planners. They want to know when. What will the signs be? How will they prepare?

I understand that instinct; I'm a planner.

When I was in high school and I had a novel assigned in English class, I'd count the number of pages, the number of days until I had to be done and divide pages by days to set my reading requirements by the night. That book would get finished. I'd occasionally stop mid sentence or mid thoughts, but if I got to page 8 of 8 for the day, I'd met my obligation.

Down went the book, I went on my merry way, knowing that everything was going to work out fine.

I'm a planner.

I'm in a temporary situation where I'm responsible for both daycare drop off and pick up and I'm panicked everyday trying to ensure I maximize both my time with the kids and my time at work – there's no time for more time spent on the road. It's a 14-minute drive between my house and the daycare, and another 12 to my work. In the last three and half weeks, I've found every short cut, I know how to deek around traffic bottle necks based on the light sequence. I have back up plans and back ups to my back up plans – and I make it home for dinner too.

I'm a planner.

My brother asked me to be the Emcee at his wedding a few years ago. Three weeks before the date of the wedding, he and his soon to be wife had yet to plan the sequence of events at the reception. No script, no announcements, no list of speakers. I couldn't handle it – it literally was driving me insane. I just wrote it out for them, divided the parts between myself and the other Emcee, I assigned various tasks to the bridal party. It was a great reception because... in no small part because - I am a planner.

So I understand that in the face of a massive event like the leveling of the Temple, those listening to Jesus would like a hint on timing... or foreshadowing events...

But Jesus provides no great clues. Instead, he lists a series of warnings:

- he predicts false prophets
- he indicates there will be news of wars and insurrections
- he cites powerful earthquakes, famines and plagues

The people in the Temple are warned not to be deceived, not to follow those false prophets, not to be terrified. These terrible things are going to happen. It will not be the end.

As Jesus sets out, His followers will be seized, persecuted and handed over by brothers, relatives and friends and that some will be put to death.

Right about at this point in the Gospel, I'm getting uncomfortable and really wondering about Jesus' message, and then you hear some degree of

reassurance:

Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand,
for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking
that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

As a planner, I'm not very comfortable with this. Because in my life, I solve my own problems. I do my homework – I study for interviews, I think through my chore list, I engage with experts, I do research and I most definitely prepare my arguments in advance. That's how I ensure that I'm doing my best. That's how things get done.

The thing is... by the time Luke records this Gospel and Jesus' prediction of the Temple being leveled – the Temple is already in the ground – decades earlier.

Because the Temple, for all its religious symbolism, was actually as much a veneration of Herod as it was of God. And it was, after all, just a building. And frankly, God doesn't really care about any of that. Jesus doesn't soften the blow about the leveling of the Temple, because these preoccupations of ours – the beauty of the Temple or the Parliament buildings, these things I plan, the life energy I put into avoiding being unprepared to make sure I “get things done”, they're all trivial – they're all mortal.

“But by your perseverance you will secure your life.”

That perseverance Jesus speaks about has nothing to do with my worldly life. And in truth, when the going gets tough – in true times of crisis – you and I won't be able to rely on any of our worldly preoccupations either.

I think that what Jesus is trying to say through this passage is that ultimately, we will not be spared. Bad things will and do happen to good people. We will each face some devastation. Given that we find ourselves here in Canada, many of us are lucky to live rather comfortable and safe existences, what will we truly do when difficult times hit?

I have a friend whose marriage is breaking up. She got married in her mid twenties, had two children, and then started to feel a distance from her husband. He was distracted with work projects, often away from home – ostensibly to make more money for the home and lifestyle they wanted. Then came the realization that he was being unfaithful once, then it happened again, and a third time. Eventually it became impossible for her

to support anymore. Her children were being affected, she was deeply ashamed, traumatically betrayed, and she eventually decided it had to stop.

I had a work acquaintance who was always a little dissatisfied with life. He had difficulty fitting in. He sometimes said inappropriate things. He never got the respect or promotions he thought he deserved. He didn't seem to have many personal relationships. I actually thought he was getting better and less frustrated, more engaged in his work. Then one day last year while I was on maternity leave, I found out he had committed suicide. He had a substance abuse problem. He didn't want to live anymore.

I have a neighbor whose only grandson was born into this world with failing to thrive after a routine pregnancy. She tells me that she is up late at night on Google trying to learn about therapies that could help her "little guy". She watches him grow and not meet traditional milestones, the same milestones she watches my daughter reach at approximately the right time. She tries to find joy in the every day existence of this precious little boy, to make his life as normal as possible. And I can see that she worries about the stress this places on her daughter trying to take care of a medically fragile child.

These people, they're dealing with terrible situations, they weren't bad people. They didn't taunt fate, they didn't fail to do their homework – things just happened.

The truth is people like me, the planners, we give ourselves a false sense of security in trying to control our daily lives. But we can't plan our way out of hard times, and our worldly goods won't help us either.

But our faith can sustain us, through the periods we cannot plan for. Periods where we feel alone and hopeless.

When we put our trust in the Lord it must be total and whole. You can't say I trust in the Lord but not entirely because I trust in myself and in my plan more.

I don't want to pretend this is easy. It isn't easy. Actually, I'm terrible at it. I'm good at thanking God for my blessings, I'm good at asking God for protection, I'm terrible at trusting God for anything. But there will come a day when all my plans will come to nothing, when I will face a challenge greater than myself and I will have nothing but faith.

And in my trying not to plan, I have come up with a plan.

I'm asking you to help me. To pray for me to believe that when the hard times strike, I have the perseverance to soldier on and trust in God. To feel serenity and the presence of God, to let go of the planning and forget the possessions. I'll pray for you too – because I'm pretty sure this is a universal problem.

The Temple will be leveled. Your perseverance you will secure your life.