

Longing for Security

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Note: This homily is based on Luke 21:5–19. Please read that passage to the congregation before preaching this homily.

In so many ways we face threat. Our world is in the grip of significant climate change, and we long to see some action taken to reduce the threat we all face. Our farmers, towns and cities are feeling the despairing grip of a terrible drought. We long for our government to do something significant to address this threat.

Our passion for security is also seen in our admiration of things that endure. The restoration of historic buildings; traditions which have survived many years, we commemorate famous victories, battles, achievements, which have built our society. These achievements give us a confidence that life is enduring. That's comforting. While we have a history to cherish, and a future to anticipate, on the personal level we look for security.

We long for security in a world which is under constant threat and decay. While we make advances through scientific breakthroughs in dealing with disabilities, diseases and health, yet we all face the reality of our own death. Life is so fragile. The lives of the ones we love, seems so tenuous.

In the episode Luke has recorded for us today, Jesus walks his disciples through their own search for security. He concludes with a promise of true, lasting and enduring security. Let's explore this together.

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In the opening verses of the chapter Luke noted that Jesus and his disciples were in the Temple in Jerusalem. Notice in vs. 5 they are like tourists who have just seen the best of the tourist attractions. In Sydney it'd be the Opera House; in Queensland would it be the Great Barrier Reef? Or the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane. Or maybe Wet and Wild. In Jerusalem, it's the Temple. As they walk around, in vs. 5 Luke notes:

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God.

Indeed it was a marvelous building - spectacular marble stones, some 30 metres (67 feet) long and 5 metres (12 feet) high and 8 metres (18 feet) wide. Stones of staggering size and beauty. They were decorated with gold plaques and gold wall hangings - like the golden vine King Herod gave with grape clusters as tall as a man. The Temple was built to impress and to last. The disciples are mesmerised. It summed up the wealth and achievements of the nation. The disciples would have felt so proud for Israel to have such a magnificent edifice. Strong, secure. Beautiful. This was the centre of their city.

Jesus' words in the next verse bring them crashing down to earth. He said: *"As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."*

The shock must have stunned them. This is God's Temple - who will be able to destroy it? How could they? It's secure. God protects it. Besides, it's so massive. And yet Jesus said, "Not one stone on top of another?"

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Indeed, within 60 years the Temple was destroyed. Today we can still see what remains - the Wailing Wall. Perhaps you've visited Jerusalem and seen it yourself.

Jesus uses the apparent security of the Temple to awaken his disciples to realise that earthly security is so fragile. And because we have such a yearning for security we are so attracted to anything which seems to provide some security - we own a property and a house, we have superannuation, we buy securities on the stock market, and we buy gold when we feel uncertain. We have a secure job. We feel "secure". But all those can go so quickly.

Because we long to be secure, we try to find security in all sorts of things: the disciples found some sense of security in the Temple building. They also have found security in Jesus - they are committed to following him - even though he's told them that death awaits him. Yet he has promised that he will be raised. That he will come again.

That's good news, but Jesus also knows that they will have such a longing for security that they will get overwhelmed and be tempted to find security in the wrong places. Jesus outlines 3 sources of false security they may be attracted to.

In vs. 8 Jesus warns them about false Messiahs. He said:

"... many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."

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The people who will be attracted by this claim are those who believe in God, who believe in Jesus. They are looking for him. People like you and me. People like the disciples. Jesus simply says: Don't believe them. Don't be deceived. He means that when he comes again, you won't need to be told. Keep looking for that time, but don't be deceived.

In vs. 9-11 Jesus affirms that before he comes again, all sorts of upheavals will threaten us: wars, revolutions, nation against nation, earthquakes, famines, great signs from heaven.

In vs. 12-17 Jesus says that before he comes, times will be very difficult for disciples; very difficult for those who follow him. Again, those places where we thought there was security, turn out to be against us. Listen to his words: *"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name."*

And surprisingly, this persecution will also be opportunity for us to affirm that we find our security in Jesus. He promises that at that time the Holy Spirit will give us the words. Be comforted to know that he will hold you secure. But even this is not the end. Look at vs. 16-17 as Jesus explains:

"You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 All men will hate you because of me."

In the midst of all this turmoil and opposition, we need to hear Jesus' promise in vs. 18-19:

"But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By standing firm you will gain life."

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Hear Jesus' promise. In him, we find genuine security. In him, we find life. He is telling his disciples what they can expect in the rest of their life, and most ended up dying for him. Today it is the same: Many of his followers are in prison, persecuted, killed for being his disciples. We are not powerless in this matter. We can pray for them - that is what they especially ask for. What to pray? Pray that they will stand firm in Jesus. Pray that they will be confident of his promise: *not a hair of your head will perish*. Pray that they would bear faithful testimony to Jesus.

And you, and I - we too need to trust this promise. Otherwise we will be deceived into seeking security in false hopes that the world offers.

Trust Jesus - stand firm in him and you will gain life. They are his words: **"stand firm in Jesus and you will gain life."**