

**Sermon Preached by the Rev. Matthew Hoxsie Mead
Rector of the Parish of Christ the Redeemer, Pelham
November 13, 2016, Proper 28, Year C**

Malachi 4:1-2a; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Have you ever been to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris? I have. You can go inside and climb to the top, and see the White City stretching gloriously off in endless spokes from that hub. The Arc de Triomphe is amazing, but its not particularly original. It is based on the Arch of Titus in Rome. If you've ever been to Rome, you've almost certainly walked through it as you pass from the Forum to the Coliseum. It was built in 81AD by the Emperor Domitian in honor of his older brother Titus who was Emperor from 79-81 AD, but who was mostly remembered for his prowess as a Roman General. His military accomplishments are carved all over the Arch of Titus.

Most scholars think that the Gospel according to Luke was written right around that same time, between 80-90 AD. We're talking about 45-55 years after Jesus' resurrection, and about 20 years after Saint Paul's martyrdom in Rome. That fits with the tradition that Saint Luke, who was a contemporary and companion of Saint Paul, died peacefully at the age of 84. Saint Luke would have known very well who Titus was, even before he became Emperor. Why?

About 15 years earlier, in 66 AD, there was a revolt in the Roman province of Judea which began what it called the Jewish Roman War. The turning point in the war was in 70 AD when the Emperor Nero sent in Titus to crush the rebellion. Titus laid siege to Jerusalem. Over the course of months he broke through a series of defensive walls around the city until by August of AD 70 the defenders of the city were walled into the area near the Temple. As the siege broke through this last fortification, the Temple – the same Temple that Jesus is speaking about in today's Gospel – caught fire and was completely destroyed. Titus' goal was not the destruction of the Temple. He had hoped to keep it intact so that it could be turned into another Pantheon – like the famous one in Rome – a temple for all of the gods of Rome, and a place that showcase Roman control over every aspect of life, including faith. The historian Josephus claims that over one million people died in that siege. As I said, the Arch of Titus contains a relief of his military accomplishments – the south relief is devoted to depictions of Roman soldiers removing menorahs and other decorations from the Temple.

The Arch of Titus stands today. The Temple has never been rebuilt. The destruction of the Temple was the end of the Jewish priesthood and the loss of the focal point of religious life. In today's Gospel we hear a conversation that begins with how marvelous the Temple was. Throughout his life Jesus worshipped in the Temple. Following Jewish custom, he was presented in the Temple forty days after his birth. When he was twelve he got separated from his family, and they found him in the Temple speaking with the elders. He visited the Temple for the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) each year. He visited the Temple for Passover each year. That's why he is there in today's Gospel. Jesus has entered Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and when asked about how marvelous the Temple was, he had the audacity to note that the Temple wouldn't last forever. One of the charges levied against Jesus just a few days later would be that he prophesied the destruction of the Temple. Well, he was right. The Temple was destroyed, but Jesus lives. The Roman Empire eventually crumbled, but Jesus lives.

Its been nearly two thousand years and many things have changed, but Jesus lives. If you want a great example of what that looks like, go to Rome and visit the Pantheon in Rome. It is still standing, but it's now a church.

For the record, the readings used in church each Sunday are shared by Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics. We use what is called a common lectionary. I didn't pick them. Though voters of one or another candidate may find the lections poignant, ironic, prophetic, disagreeable, or heavy handed, it is worth noting that we always get the End of the World readings in church on the Sunday after Election Day. I would ask those looking for validation of a political position in the lections whether you found it in the Gospel passage or the Psalm.

Our readings are not about the end of the world. They are about the primacy and eternity of Jesus Christ over every human institution. The church has the audacity to remind us every year that all earthly things will fade with time, but Jesus will not. Our liturgical year builds up this theme in November until it ends next Sunday with the Feast of Christ the King, a holy day that was implemented in the aftermath of World War 1 to serve as a reminder that Christians are citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Let me be blunt. Jesus loves you if you are Republican, Democrat, Independent, Worker, Green, Conservative, Libertarian, Socialist or any other party. We all know that people in our congregation and our towns voted for every side that there was, including not voting at all. However you voted and even if you didn't vote, Jesus loves you. We know that emotions over the past week have ranged from elation to fear to numbness to anger to indifference and everything in between. However you are feeling, Jesus loves you.

That is not to imply that any Christian is called to smooth over deep political divisions. Nor is it to suggest that Christians should bury their heads in the sand – we are called to respect the dignity of every human being and to be agents of justice and peace in and to the world. But you can't do that if you can't even love your neighbor or your enemy, as you love yourself. Reconciliation and healing take time, perseverance, listening, learning, but most important reconciliation and healing take eyes that view the other as a child of God.

Whether or not you think the world is ending, you aren't off the hook from Jesus' commandment to love and comfort your neighbor, to love and comfort your enemy, to use your heart, voice, hands, and feet to press for love, mercy, comfort, justice, and peace.

Form the prophet Malachi: "For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." For the little while that we have in this world we have been given the gift of being Jesus' Body to the world. You and I are the Body of the Son of Righteousness. Go into the world with healing in your wings.