

## Attachment

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**(Luke 21:5-19)** – When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them.

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

"But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

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**C**huck was supposed to preach today, but he came down with bronchitis, so I'm pinch hitting for him. I pulled this sermon from the file. If you were here on November 18, 2001, you've already heard it, so feel free to take a nap. I'm hoping your memory is a

leaky as mine and it'll sound new even if it's not.

**T**here is a story that is supposed to be true, about a Benedictine archbishop of the High Middle Ages living in the days when people endowed the monasteries with great

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wealth and priceless art in exchange for the prayers of the monks. The archbishop had been away on state business, and as he returned home to his grand castle, he could see that the estate was entirely engulfed in flames. Quietly the archbishop watched his majestic home burn with all of its treasures within, and he was overheard saying with a rapt expression, "Dear God, a burning fire is a beautiful thing to watch."

One of the words that has crossed easily into both the language of the spirit and the language of psychology is the term *attachment*. If you've worshiped for very long in this beautiful and holy place, you have probably formed some attachment to this very space. If you walk in here and feel calm coming over you, if you look around and sense a rising feeling of peace – you have nurtured some attachment to this place of worship.

Several years ago when I was the rector of St. John's in Fort Smith, a tornado hit the downtown area, crossed over the Arkansas River and did great damage to Van Buren. In the earliest moments of dawn, the Junior Warden Gene Rapley got into his car to go see about the church. Gene Rapley had been brought up in that church; baptized as a child. His parents had both been buried from that church. He had chaired the capital funds drive to restore it. He loves that church with all his heart.

As he wound his way in the dark through the blocked streets and fallen limbs, it seemed to take him forever to get close to the downtown. Reports made it sound like the tornado had hit right where the church was. When he got a few blocks away from the church, the road was entirely blocked. It looked like a war zone. He could go no further.

Gene got out of his car, and picked his way by flashlight and by the beginning streaks of eastern light. I'll never forget his face as he told me the story. "I came up from C Street, not knowing if it would even be there;" then his voice broke and tears welled up, "and there she was. Old St. Paul's standing strong and proud," and Gene dissolved with sobs of gratitude.

When we were in Jerusalem we joined Jewish pilgrims at the Wailing Wall, the only part still standing from the ancient Jerusalem temple. Visitors touch the wall; they kiss its stones; they bow in reverence and read long passages of scripture; they tuck small notes of intercession into its ancient cracks. It is that temple that Luke has Jesus speak of in this gospel: "When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, 'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'"

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**E**ven ancient and powerful and holy things are mere things. Temporary, vulnerable, passing away. They can serve as means to connect us with the divine, but they are not divine. We were created for God, and only God will truly satisfy us. We were created with a God-shaped vacuum within us, and only God can fill our deepest longing. Everything we trust in short of God will fail; it is temporary, vulnerable, passing away. And yet, at the same time, all creation is good – infused with divine presence. This church is a good and holy place where we find we can be drawn into a sense of God's presence. The Bible and the Sacraments are good and holy, and they connect us with the Divine and reveal God to us. But all of these are still just things. They point us toward the reality of the divine Mystery – but only God can satisfy us.

**S**o Jesus gives us warnings. Don't put your deepest trust in things. Don't become attached to that which is less than God. And he points to the holiest object in their world and says to his friends, "All will be thrown down."

The reaction of those who hear him is one of predictable anxiety. "When? How will we know?" Another attachment – the need to know; one of our desperate forms of control. "You can't know!" he tells them, "and don't believe anyone who says they know." The enticing temptation of various forms

of fundamentalism is their false promise of certainty in an uncertain world. "Do not go after them," Jesus says. Surrender your need to know, and trust instead the divine mystery that is known in unknowing.

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified." Jesus takes aim at another attachment – the need for security. In a violent and fragile world, it is the way of humanity that there will be wars. There will be earthquake and famine and plague. We live in a vulnerable creation. That's the way it is. There is nothing you can do to guarantee your safety. Relax and accept reality, accept your vulnerability. There are things which will threaten to make us afraid, to terrify us – portents and even signs from heaven. Do not be afraid. The living God of the resurrected One is greater than all these. Your security lies deep within God's mysterious divine life.

Jesus even goes further, and releases them from the need even to defend themselves, bodily or verbally. "Don't bother to prepare your defense in advance. I'll give you the words you need."

Finally, he goes to our most intimate and vulnerable place. Family. You can't even trust your own family. Not ultimately. And how many of us know that all too well.

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**T**he spiritual journey is a journey toward pure faith in God. That's where our ultimate happiness lies. God's divine loving presence is always with us at the center of our being, breathing us into life.

God is our perfect security, perfect truth, perfect love. Only God is great enough to fulfill our deepest needs.

Everything else is a gift. This place, that family, that earthquake, the next threat. Underneath it all is the bedrock presence of God loving us into being. So relax and be free. "Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

**W**hen you are no longer attached, clinging fearfully to what you are afraid to lose, you are free to enjoy everything. You are as free to shed tears of gratitude when the tornado misses as you are free to enjoy the beauty of the fire. You are as free to seek truth boldly as you are free not to know much with any certainty. You are free to live safely within the wings of God's divine care even as you are free to surrender your life in a moment in this unpredictable and vulnerable world. You are free to speak openly and to love extravagantly even as you are free to suffer betrayal and sabotage without being undone.

You are free to use and enjoy every created thing in its appropriate way. To care for this holy place and support its good work. To love your family and to work and to grow. But do all that accepting how temporary, vulnerable and passing away all is, except God. And hold on to things lightly. Don't trust them. Don't trust them for your happiness. No, trust God. Only God is enough to make you happy; enough to satisfy you. If you try to fill your appetite for God with something or someone else, you'll just make a mess of things.



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