

November 16, 2025—Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

Our Testimony

“Some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God...” So this was Herod’s temple, one of many massive building projects undertaken by King Herod the Great. Herod started this work some 15 years before Jesus was born, and it continued after Herod died—possibly on until the Romans destroyed the Temple while putting down a revolt among the people of Judea in the year 70. And by all accounts, it was pretty glorious, starting with its enormous size. And of course, as those around Jesus noticed, it was “adorned with beautiful stones” and other “gifts dedicated to God.” And it’s maybe nice to think that Herod built this glorious structure to honor God, based on his own great piety. But it’s more likely that Herod was just trying to make sure that everyone knew how great he was. He wanted Rome to think that he was powerful and beloved by his subjects, and he wanted his subjects to think that he was powerful and devoted to God, and he wanted everyone to have no doubt that Herod was in charge.

And if that reminds you of anyone in particular, well, it should. In fact, it might remind you of a lot of people, because small-minded men throughout history have tried to hide the fear of their own ultimate insignificance by building enormous monuments to their own power and their own greatness.

But 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.” None of this, he reminds us, is going to last.

Which somehow manages to be both comforting and unsettling at the same time. Comforting, I think, to know that tyrants always fall; and the weakness that hides beneath their gaudy shows of strength always comes to light. And unsettling, of course, because that means change, and change is frightening—and I don’t mean that just in the everyday sense that change is hard. We’re talking about massive societal change, here, the kind that’s accompanied by “wars and insurrections ... earthquakes ... famines and plagues ...” and all sorts of things that are easy to interpret as “dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.” Change at that scale is terrifying: no one escapes that sort of upheaval unscathed.

And yet, in the midst of all that, Jesus tells his followers, “do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” It is easy, friends, to look around at how bad things are getting and think it would be hard to get much worse, and maybe we’re coming up at last on the end of it all. I know there are days when I pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” because I’m just about ready for the world to end. And to some extent, I think, it’s good for us to remember that our hope does not lie only in humanity, our own ability to save ourselves and get ourselves out of the messes we always seem to get ourselves into. It’s good for us to remember that our hope is ultimately in God, who is always with us and who will, somehow, renew and remake all of creation and gather all of humanity together and dwell among us as our God.

But it’s also important, I think, to remember what Jesus is actually saying here. “The end will not follow immediately,” he says. All the wars and insurrections and earthquakes and famines and plagues and hurricanes and wildfires and tyranny and injustice and hatred are *not* the beginning of the end. They are, unfortunately, business as usual. They have always been part of life on earth, and they always will be—until God makes a new heaven and a new earth, whenever that might be.

And so the question for us is, and always has been, how do we live our lives in the meantime? How do we get through All This, knowing that things might very well get worse before they get any better?

Jesus gives an answer to this, which is not necessarily easy for us to appreciate or understand. He tells us that this time of troubles—like similar times in the past, and more that are sure to come—will give us “an opportunity to testify.” And what I think that means is that

we have the opportunity to live out our lives in such a way as to demonstrate that God is real, that God is love, and that God will have the final word.

Can you imagine what that looks like? I think our testimony looks like being the kind of place where people know they can find help when they need it—and we all need it sometimes. Connie and Doreen told a story the other night about a man who came to the church during welcoming and centering prayer on Wednesday morning, looking for help on his journey home to Canada. And he showed up here because someone in Seattle told him that Faith Episcopal Church in Poulsbo was a place where he could find help. I have no idea who told him that or why, but I'm so grateful to Connie and Doreen and everyone else at prayer that morning for proving that person right.

I think our testimony looks like serving a hot meal to anyone who wants one on a Monday, and not asking whether they're willing to work in some misguided attempt to twist the words of 2 Thessalonians against people in need. I read a couple of different theories this week about why those words are in 2 Thessalonians—"Anyone unwilling to work should not eat." One suggested that there were members of that community who were so convinced that Jesus was coming back any day now that they quit their jobs and spent all their time sticking their nose into everyone else's business instead of being about the business of building up the church to last for the long haul. Another one suggested that the church was organized as a community of mutual aid, which relied on everyone doing their part to make sure that no one goes without. But if you're not pitching in in a community like that it's not fair to expect the community to pick up your slack. Just to be clear, none of these commentaries suggested that these words should be taken as a blueprint for how government aid to elderly folks, disabled folks, needy children, and people forced to live on the street should work.

I think our testimony looks like coming together as a village to raise our children, and making sure they know down to their toes that they're loved and accepted just as they are, not just for who they might grow up to be—loved and accepted by this community and by the God we worship here.

I think our testimony looks like being seen at Poulsbo Pride and Kitsap Pride, being seen at the trans day of remembrance, being seen at protests at Waterfront Park, visibly speaking out and speaking up for the rights and liberties of all people.

And maybe, once in a while, our testimony might even require that we use words, that we tell the story of all that God has done for us and all that God is still doing in the world. That's why we're spending time talking about sources of transformation and where we've seen transformation happening and the Holy Spirit at work in this place. I'm grateful to those of you who have shared your stories, and I hope to hear more of them in the weeks and months and years ahead. Sharing your story here is good practice for what you might do if someone asks you why you bother going to church instead of sleeping in on a Sunday morning. But it's more than that—telling our stories and hearing those stories is also a source of transformation. More than once in the last week or so, I've been brought to tears hearing your stories, as the Spirit continues working on me.

Fundamentally, our testimony looks like holding on to love—not letting all the evil in the world turn us into cynics, not letting all the times we've been hurt harden our hearts to stone, not letting the times we live in drive us to despair. It looks like endurance—refusing to let go of God's grace, God's goodness, God's love, in the face of so much that wants us to deny it. "By your endurance you will gain your souls," Jesus says. As BreAnna put it during Bible study the other night, endurance means holding on to our humanity in the midst of All This, refusing to let the times we live in make us any less children of God.

As God continues working in us, may we continue working in the world, living out in our lives the truth we proclaim: that God is real, that God is love, and that God will have the final word.

Amen.