

*As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" 2Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."*

*3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" 5Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.*

I talked with a friend the other day – I had not talked with her for a couple of years – the other day we did some catching up. We talked about our kids, changes in their lives – we talked about ourselves – what has been happening. Then she asked me if I had heard the bad news. "No," I responded. She told me that her husband has a brain tumor – though they removed the tumor tentacles have invaded the surrounding brain tissue– the doctors are not holding out any hope that he will survive it. She was angry with the doctor for in talking with her husband he seemed to want to emphasize the hopelessness of the situation. "My husband needs hope – otherwise he will give up," she told me.

I listened and I wondered. Is false hope a good thing? Is it best to let people live with illusions – or is it best to tell it like it is? Is it best to protect the ones we love from truth that may disturb them or is it best to confront the truth?

Jesus and his disciples were coming out of the temple. *"Look, teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"*

The disciples were impressed and rightly so. A description of this temple that had been refurbished by Herod tells of gold covered walls and white stone pillars so that when the sun shone upon it the temple was too bright to look at – dazzling – blinding - glorious.

"Look, Jesus!"

*“Do you see these great buildings?” Jesus replied. “Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”*

Now why did Jesus have to say that? Nothing would be changed by his words. Sometimes the prophets spoke in the hope that the people would repent and their repenting would lead to a different future. It is like the doctor coming in and saying, “You need to watch your diet or you will get diabetes.” That doctor is looking for a change in behavior – the information may help the patient make that change and the disease might be averted. But Jesus is more like the doctor my friend described – simply telling about an awful thing that will happen – you are going to die of this cancer. The temple would be destroyed – not one stone left upon another. Now that is not the way it happened – the temple was burned – destroyed by fire – not thrown down. But the result was the same – the temple that was the source of pride and the very place where the Lord of all creation promised to be present – the temple would be destroyed.

Why was it important to tell the disciples that?

I think Jesus did not want them to put their hopes in the wrong place.

Some Christians believe in the power of prayer to bring healing. Studies show that parents who have this strong faith that their child will be healed are much more able to stay positive and to do the right things for their child throughout difficult treatment. But if the child dies these very parents with this deep faith do the worst of all the parents that lose children. For not only have they lost a child, but they lose the god that they have believed in as well for that god is a god that heals the children of those god loves. The god they worshipped and trusted in dies the day their child dies.

Jesus did not want his disciples to have false hope. When his disciples asked him, *“Tell us when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”* Then Jesus began to say to them, *“Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to*

*come. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.*

Jesus is describing a world that is coming apart but he speaks of the coming apart as birth pains. It is not just the temple in Jerusalem that has been destroyed but nation after nation – kingdom after kingdom. In a great many of those nations and kingdoms were Christians that thought that the world could not go on if their world fell apart. Like parents that lose a child or a wife that loses a husband it seems that the world could not go on after that but it does. Even in some of the most awful places on this earth this day God gives hope, and courage and love.

Jesus wants us to be ready for the worst – to know that the worst can come and that God will still have a way to supply us with faith and with hope and with love. Jesus does not tell of these birthpangs so that we can time the moment of delivery but so that we do not panic and live in fear through it all. Jesus who has entered into death itself was born to a new life that always awaits those that believe in him. Children do die and twin towers fall and sometimes really bad things happen in this world. But the God who raised Jesus from the dead will not give up on you. In every moment you will live in God's love and providing. Whether that life be lived in a mansion or in a refugee camp God will supply what you need until that day when you fall into Jesus' hands in death.

This is the one hope that will never be proved false. Amen.