

"An Opportunity to Testify"

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

November 14, 2004

Do you always know just the right thing to say? Sometimes I wished I could think as fast as some people that I have read about that seemed to know just the right thing to say.

A truck driver was driving along on the freeway. A sign comes up that reads "Low Bridge Ahead." Before he knows it the bridge is right ahead of him and he gets stuck under the bridge. Cars are backed up for miles. Finally, a police car comes up. The cop gets out of his car and walks around to the truck driver, puts his hands on his hips and says, "Got stuck, huh?" The truck driver says, "No, I was delivering this bridge and ran out of gas."

The policeman got out of his car and the kid who was stopped for speeding rolled down his window. "I've been waiting for you all day," the officer said. The kid replied, "Yeah, well I got here as fast as I could."

A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store, but couldn't find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?" The stock boy replied, "No ma'am, they're dead."

Jesus stood with some of His followers in the outer areas of the Temple. It was beautiful beyond describing. Massive rocks formed the structure - stones so large that there was no need for any mortar to hold them together. It is said that the smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone is around 40 feet long and 10 feet high, and it weighed hundreds of tons! The walls towered over Jerusalem, over 400 feet in one area. Inside the four walls was 45 acres of bedrock mountain that had been shaved flat and one author suggested that during Jesus' day a quarter of a million people could fit comfortably within the structure.

Who would not stand there in awe and imagine that such a structure would stand forever. But then Jesus broke into that inspiring moment with a comment - "..... the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another" And there was no snappy 'come back'. What could you say to such a prediction?

Sometimes there are just no clever words to say. I found myself in that predicament as I considered the scriptures that you have just heard. They are down right depressing. The prophet, Malachi told the people that days of great judgement were coming - judgement so hot that neither the branches or root of the arrogant and evil doer would survive. Jesus talked about a time of wars and insurrections - of nation rising against nation - of famines and earthquakes - of betrayal and persecution even from within your own family. And there is no clever response.

And probably it is even more difficult to think of any kind of cute response in light of the fact that we see all of those things happening in our world. On this week when we have again celebrated "Veterans Day" we recognize that war continues to rage in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. We know that many

places in our world are in turmoil even when they do not make the news. We are reminded of that fact today when we hear the Orphan Grain Train report about 10 Christian churches and 8 Christian schools being burned in Liberia. Closer to home we can feel the division in our nation as neighbors choose sides over issues like a presidential election, the definition of marriage and embryonic stem cell research And there are no effective and clever responses that can just allow us to simply laugh it off.

There are those who read a scripture text this today's Gospel text and hold it up against the events that make the evening news and say that the end is near. Even, way back in the early Christian churches such as the church in Thessalonika, to which our second reading was addressed, there were people who became so depressed by the world situation that they were convinced that they were living in the end of time and they just said down, stopped doing anything productive, and waited for the end. Paul told them that that was the wrong approach.

But how do we, as Christians, respond to our world? Certainly, we in this room, enjoy the blessing of sitting on the sidelines of many of the struggle that faces our world. But it is not as though we are unaffected as the dark side of the world creeps into our lives in many ways - whether it be through illness, personal struggles, or various connections to the world out there. How will we respond? What words are there to say?

Almost hidden in the midst of these comments of Jesus to His disciples is a great response – clever – ingenious! He talks about wars, nations rising against nation, earthquakes, famine, plagues, great signs in the heavens, persecution and suddenly there is an attitude change WOW - What an opportunity!!! Did you catch that? What an opportunity we have as Christians! We have the opportunity to 'testify' to the light of Christ that changes the darkness of the world.

Think about the testimony that we have to offer our world. Jesus the Christ is the light of understand and compassion in the darkness. He is the Bread of Life for those who know spiritual starvation and provides all that we need by way of daily food - we just have to figure out how to share that with the world. Jesus is the one that comes to us always with the words, "Peace be with you!" - a most gracious gift. And though kingdoms rise and fall, though the earth tear itself apart, we know that the kingdom of God endures forever. What an opportunity that we have to testify.

Standing there, stunned over the dark predictions of Jesus, I wonder if the disciples believe that they really had anything clever or life changing to say to the world around them. And I wonder if we really believe that we have anything to say in the midst of the darkness. I wonder if we really believe that there is light, peace, hope and life in Jesus. The disciples came to believe it after the resurrection and they testified. We have such good news — let us take the opportunities that we have in the darkness to speak and live a testimony of good news.

AMEN