

## Grandview Calvary Baptist Church

March 22, 2020. "Concerning Signs and Jesus' Comforting Words." Claudia Rossetto

Scriptures: Luke 19:28 – 21:38.

### I. Introduction

Welcome everyone in the name of Jesus to this electronic way of keeping our weekly rhythms of Church. And why bother keeping a rhythm, specially during this COVID-19 pandemic? Well, I believe that "being God's people", or being "people of peace" during any time can only be possible when we connect with God in worship and through his Word, and when we connect with one another. After all, we love a Triune God –a God who is a community. The weekly rhythm comes from the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, (Exodus 20: 8-11)." So, with the help of technology here we are aiming to keep today's Sabbath holy.

I don't know how your heart may be feeling today due to this Corona Virus situation. Here are some options mentioned by Jesus in today's scripture: "in anguish," "perplex," "apprehensive of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:25). Maybe non of the above. One thing is for sure: the whole world is not doing business as usual. We are living times of uncertainty and major disruption. Yet, we can take heart and hear Jesus' words:

*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Luke 21: 32).*

These words may not sound very encouraging to you now. Also, who talks like that anyway? And what kind of words could stand the test of time? Well, hang in there for the next 20 minutes and resist the temptation to Netflix or YouTube something else.

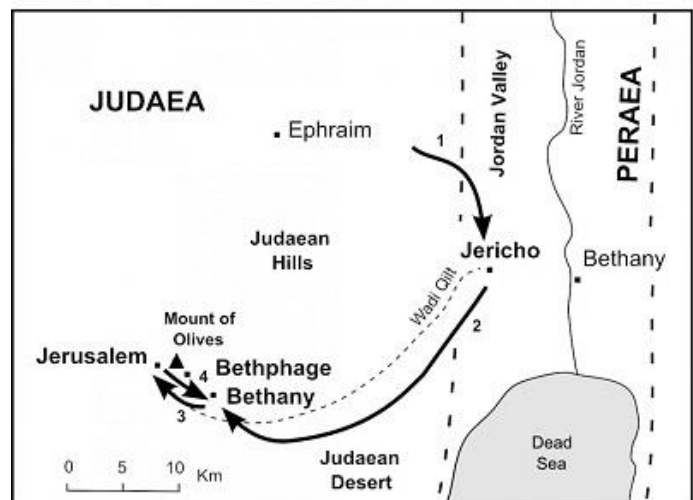
### II. Last week's recap

Last Sunday I thoroughly enjoyed Jake's online sermon. A couple of people and my family heard him while meeting at my home to have church. Jake spoke about Zacchaeus, a tax collector. A man who despite his terrible reputation was welcomed by Jesus. The part that touched me the most was that Jesus noticed him in a crowd and knew his name. How great is it that even when we may seem small and anonymous in a crowd, Jesus "sees" and "calls" our name and wants to "dine" with us? That's what Jesus did with Zacchaeus. He invited himself for dinner to his house. Jesus, huh, What a guest! One who invites himself. Maybe because he knew that Zacchaeus would not have the courage to invite Him, and yet he so badly wanted to know Jesus. Dining with Jesus changed Zacchaeus life for ever. Jesus freed him from shame and greed.

Today we will touch on a few stories in Luke 19 and 20 and we will end in Luke chapter 21, when Jesus talks about the end times in the temple. Buckle up and put on your imagination glasses.

### III. Epic Sunday, Monday and Tuesday

Like millions in our world now, Jesus was always on the move during his three years of public ministry. Last Sunday we left Jesus in Jericho, where he met with Zacchaeus. We find him today approaching Jerusalem, which was about a 25 Km journey. Like coming from Surrey Guilford Station to 1<sup>st</sup> and Commercial Ave in Vancouver. What do you do on Sundays? Luke 19 tells



us that Jesus chose to ride a wild donkey to enter Jerusalem. Interesting weekend activity. So why a donkey? Every single move and word of Jesus is very intentional and filled with historical and redemptive significance. Jesus choice of entering on a donkey, over a horse for example, does make a statement about him being a humble and peaceful King. Today, I want to highlight this donkey's connection to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Exodus 34:18-20 mentions a donkey in connection to the Festival of the Unleavened Bread which was part of the Passover. We read:

“The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock. Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons. (Exodus 34:18-20)

Firstborn donkeys were impure animals unworthy of being brought for sacrifice. They needed to be replaced with a lamb. If not, they needed to be made unable to work by breaking their necks.

Hosea 8 tells us that the donkey is Israel in its stubbornness of going after the materialism of Assyria:

like a wild donkey wandering alone.  
Ephraim has sold herself to lovers. Hosea 8:8

So, by Jesus riding a donkey that had never been used to work, he was presenting himself as the lamb who would redeem Israel. God's firstborn child had gone astray as a wild donkey and was unworthy of being sacrificed. A lamb was needed. Jesus was the lamb that God provided. Ask those who ride wild donkeys. They kick and are very stubborn. Thanks be to God who redeems us from our greed. Only Jesus can tame our stubbornness and use us for higher purposes. We read that there was a “crowd” welcoming Jesus. Where was this crowd from? In preparation for the Passover thousands of other pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem. People went a week in advance to perform purification rituals, so they'd be ready and worthy to participate in the Passover celebrations. As Jesus and the donkey got to Jerusalem, Jesus wept. He cried because Jerusalem would not receive him as the King of Peace, so terrible things would happen in Jerusalem. We'll read more on this.

### **Jesus cleans the temple**

This takes us to a Jesus who “loses it”. He enters the Jerusalem temple courts and begins driving out merchants and he calls the temple “his house” saying:

“My house will be house of prayer, but you have made it in a ‘den of robbers.’” (Luke 19:46)

Now imagine, a Peace teacher like Gandhi, entering your house, kicking out people who were gathered there, overturning tables and cleaning your house. What would you ask him? Jesus cleansing actions in the temple called for an obvious question from the religious authorities: “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things?” (Luke 20:1). In other words: who do you think you are? Jesus doesn't feel the need to directly answer their question. In his Jewish style he answers their question with another one: John's baptism –was it from heaven, or of human origin?” To which they answered. “We don't know.” Jesus said: “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” I could have told them with whose authority Jesus was cleaning house.

Jesus cleansed the temple because it was “his house” and maybe because the temple represented his body that was being cleansed in preparation for sacrifice –just as other pilgrims were purifying themselves during that week in preparation for the Passover. Also, in Jesus cleansing the temple he is fulfilling one of the four expectation of the Messiah, which was to “cleans the temple”. The other three expectations were: to gather the tribes, to deal with the enemies of Israel and to reign for ever.

Now that Jesus cleaned his house, he could teach in it. We read that people came to hear him at the temple and “hung on every word He said” (Luke 19:48, NLT). Just like a Paschal lamb had to be ‘tested’ for a few days to see if it was worthy of sacrifice (Exodus 12:3,6), so was Jesus. He was tested by liberal and conservative religious authorities who asked him questions to make him say something that could justify his killing. They found no fault in Jesus’ words.

### The Widow’s Offering

One day, likely Tuesday, Jesus decides to check out “the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury” (Luke 21:1). This brings us to our main scripture for today: Luke 21. This chapter starts with the story of a “widow’s offering.” It is a short but very telling story, with a fascinating irony. We read:

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4).

So much can be said about the moving generosity in this poor widow. Today I want us to hold the widow’s attitude as a mirror of ours ‘expectations’ on the church.



About ten years ago I came to a Grandview service. I was church “shopping”. Emmanuel was preaching. He was a former Grandview pastor, originally from Burundi. Emmanuel said: “why do you come to Sundays? We don’t come on Sundays to “get” we come to “give,” to give God our gratitude and worship. That spoke directly to my sense of entitlement that was looking to see how Grandview could meet my needs. I think that is one of the things that caught Jesus’ attention. That the poor widow of our story had not sense of entitlement in her. She understood the true spirit of the temple. Unlike the merchants that Jesus kicked out of the temple she came with no transactional expectations. Her poor and widow state totally entitled her to come “expecting to have her needs met at the temple.” There were 13 trumpet shaped receptacles in the temple. One of them was to support the life of the poor. Yet, this woman came to give. She had so little. Why bother giving it? The temple was a grandiose structure of marble and gold. It did not need her two copper coins.

Her self-perception as “having something to give,” despite her deep financial poverty, speaks volumes. “I feel I have little to give,” was the most quoted reasons why people did not engage in community activities during a 2012 Vancouver Foundation survey. Feeling like you have little to give can lead you to isolation, unless like this widow, you are rooted in love which moves you to give.

Also, why not keep one of the two coins. Here is one for you God and one for me; that would have sounded fair. Yet she gave it all. Why? What did she know that we don’t now? Maybe like many other poor people in our world she depended day by day on God for her sustenance, and God never failed her. I think that the next day she did not starve. God provided for her again. And maybe that’s what she knew: a deep and trusting daily dependence on God, which delivered her to be generous.

This widow, likely old, would have been identified as the “at risk population” during this COVID-19. I wonder what she may have chosen to give during this COVID-19 times.

### **The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times**

An this brings us to Jesus words about the destruction of the temple and the signs of the end times. It starts with the great irony in the widow story. We are told that:

Some of [Jesus] disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down” (Luke 21:5-6).

About 40 years later when the temple of Jerusalem was burnt down the gold of all those votive offerings, that had the names of wealthy donors, melted down in between the rocks. In order to rescue that melted gold the soldiers ripped apart every stone, so “not one stone was left on another.” The irony is that in time, the names that gold could buy melted away, yet the story of this widow remained in the memory of millions of bible readers for more than 2000 years. Which is one illustration of Jesus’ words: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*” (Luke 21: 32). When all this COVID-19 pandemic passes away, whenever that may be, what memory will be attached to our name?

Jesus saying that the temple would be destroyed awaken major disbelief: What?. The temple was a thirty-two-acres show place. Herod, the builder, wanted Jerusalem to compete with other major cities like Athens and Rome. So, he built the temple to be a magnificent structure of marble and other precious materials. It took about 80 years and 18,000 men to build. The temple was the center of a thriving Jewish life. It represented the political and religious interests of thousand and thousands of people. In my mind the temple would be a combination of the Vatican and the Parliament buildings in Ottawa.

The natural question to Jesus foretelling of the destruction of the temple was: “Teacher ... when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” (Luke 21:7).

In the following verses Jesus gives specific signs of when the temple would be destroyed and about the signs that will tell us about his second coming. Jesus names human feelings and gives comfort and direction on what to do. Regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, he instructs:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-24).

History tells us that many chose to stay or to go back to Jerusalem, against Jesus’ advice. What would make a person go back to Jerusalem when it was being surrounded by soldiers? Zealots, a movement fighting the Roman empire, chose to go back and to stay in the city –they would rather die fighting the empire. They even burn down food supplies for the city to force Jews fight the Romans. Sometimes a “zeal for justice” ignores Jesus’ words, which may lead to the unnecessary loss of many lives. Other people went back to the city of Jerusalem to get their “stuff”. Like during a house fire, people try to go back into the fire just to collect their stuff. What does that

say about what people value? I myself feel convicted by this. I sometimes let the “material” or “what I value” dictate over common sense. I value productivity. So, during this COVID-19 times I find myself resisting the ‘common sense’ instructions to not go back to work.

Jesus words came to pass, and the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. Those who followed Jesus’ directions to flee the city likely saved their lives. As for the city, only part of a wall is left, now called the “Wailing Wall.”

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21: 32).*

Let’s now end focusing on Jesus’ words about his second coming. I approach these words with caution, and a desire to focus on human feelings and on Jesus words, that will help us live faithfully particularly during this COVID-19 times.

I grew up around Pentecostal churches in Bolivia, where there is more emphasis and familiarity with Apocalyptic texts. I was not very interested in them. After spending time studying scripture in a western intellectual setting my interest diminished even more. A couple of months ago, my sister Tatiana, who still lives in Bolivia, asked me if by any chance I was hearing from the Lord that He is coming back soon. Tatiana mentioned that many of her friends, spread around the world, were sharing with her that they were sensing that Jesus was telling them that He is coming soon. Tatiana had a similar sense. When she told me that, my initial reaction was to dismiss that, thinking that probably every generation since Jesus ascended to heaven has been “sensing” that He will come back soon, and yet he hasn’t. This COVID-19 pandemic however is making me re-consider my dismissive attitude towards the signs of the second coming of Jesus.

In this part of our scripture today Jesus speaks about the signs of his second coming. He tells us that there will be deception, disasters, and persecution, but for each difficult sign Jesus offers words of comfort and direction:

- “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.
  - When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened (Luke 21:8)
- “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me (Luke 21:10-14).
  - But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. <sup>15</sup>For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.
- You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me.
  - But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life. (Luke 21:16-19)
- “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
  - When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:25-28

In a parable Jesus also asks us to have prophetic eyes that pay attention and read the signs:

“Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.” Luke: 21 29

He ends with these words of direction:

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21: 34-36

### Conclusion and Call to Action

These words have sustained hundreds of past generations of Christians during the most devastating times of plagues, wars, persecution, and deception. We can take heart in that despite the transient nature of our bodily lives on this earth Jesus’ Words are true and he Holds our souls in His hands. Regardless of how or when this COVID-19 ends, God’s word promises a new life coming! (Romans 8:22). A higher intensity and frequency of pain can be pointing to a close birth, the birth of God’s full Kingdom on earth --when Jesus, our beloved groom, comes back. Some may be hearing the voice of our groom coming to get the Church, his bride:

My beloved ... stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
peering through the lattice.  
My beloved spoke and said to me,  
“Arise, my darling,  
my beautiful one, come with me.  
See! The winter is past;  
the rains are over and gone.  
Flowers appear on the earth;  
the season of singing has come,  
the cooing of doves  
is heard in our land.  
The fig tree forms its early fruit;  
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.  
Arise, come, my darling;  
my beautiful one, come with me.”  
-Song of Songs 2: 9-13

In these times of “anguish,” “perplexity,” “apprehensiveness of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21:25), let’s “hung on every word of Jesus” (Luke 19:48). Let’s root ourselves in his love. Let’s trust him daily for our sustenance and let’s give generously, even if it looks like it is too little.

Amen.

