

Trinity 10
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Luke 19:41-48
Knowing the Time of Your Visitation
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"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Jesus spoke these words with bitter tears as he entered Jerusalem the week he was crucified outside its gates. And less than forty years later Christ's prophecy came true. In the year 70 AD Roman legions under the command of Titus besieged Jerusalem causing mass starvation throughout the city. The soldiers spared no one as they moved through the city razing it to the ground. Finally the temple, one of the great wonders of the world was brought to ashes. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. The city of the great king laid in ruin, just as Jesus said it would.

Why did Jerusalem meet such a tragic demise? Jesus says, "because you did not know the time of your visitation." Visitation refers to God visiting his people. This should not be a terrible event, but a gracious one. God intends to bring peace and show mercy to his people. He intends to save them. The visitation Jesus speaks of here is his own arrival. Jesus is God. He is the Son of God, the Second Person in the Holy Trinity. He is eternal and all powerful. Yet, he condescended to his people, taking on our frail flesh and blood. God visited his people in a way he never did before. He joined their human race.

Although this visitation is unique, it has long been foretold. God planned from the very beginning to save his people from their sins by sending his Son to bear their iniquities. God spoke this message to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head and you will bruise his heel." God became a man, so that he could free

his people from their sins by suffering in their place. Even Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was planned by God. He spoke through the prophet Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9)

God prepared his people for his visitation by sending prophets and even angels at times to proclaim his *word*. Sometime the prophets proclaimed peace from God and the salvation that would come with his visitation, as we just heard from Zechariah. God spoke through Ezekiel, "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness." (Ez. 34:11-12) God spoke quite clearly through the prophet Isaiah that Christ would suffer and die for our sins, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned- every one- to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Is. 53:4-6)

Yet at other times God prepared his people for his visitation by having his prophets proclaim judgment and warn of punishment. God spoke through Jeremiah in our Old Testament text, "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord." (Jer. 8:12)

Sometimes God spoke peace in preparation for his visitation. Sometimes God spoke judgment. But God doesn't have a split personality. God spoke the Law and the Gospel. The Law threatens to punish all who break God's commandments. The Gospel promises peace from God to all heart broken sinners, who mourn their sinful condition. Both words are necessary in preparing for God's visitation.

Jerusalem was punished, because its people rejected God's Word. They ignored the prophets. Some they beat, some they threw into cisterns, some they stoned or sawed in two. They treated the prophets shamefully, because they rejected their words. They rejected God's word and his threat of punishment. So also they treated John the Baptist, who lost his head and so they treated Christ Jesus, the crucified.

They thought Jerusalem was too big to fail. It had the temple. God dwelt there. They had the prophets. They had the great kings. Yet Jerusalem was proud. It served false gods. Its citizens even sacrificed their children on the altar of Molech. Yet what led to Jerusalem's downfall was its refusal to repent and hear God's Word. Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken." (Luke 13:34-35a) Jerusalem was destroyed not because her sins were worse than yours, but because she rejected the word's which prepared for her visitation.

Jerusalem was not too big to fail. No one is. Yet the blood fails to rush to our own cheeks even as abominations occur in our sight. Christians speak about the greatness of America. Yet the abominations done within her borders are as wicked as those done within the walls of Jerusalem. Altars to Molech have been erected in the form of abortion clinics to sacrifice children in the name of progress and freedom. False gods have taken the place of Christ in the hearts of men and less and less people desire to hear God's word preached. America is not too big to fail.

Others think the church is too big to fail. I'm not talking about the holy bride of Christ, bought with the blood of Jesus and washed in water and the word. Rather, the institutions of men that own church buildings, where "preachers" claim to speak for God. False prophets have taken root within many churches, preaching what is contrary to God's word. They reject God's Law concerning sexual immorality or anything else that is not socially convenient. They reject the Gospel, lest it offend someone. Interestingly enough, the seminaries of these same churches teach their future pastors that our Gospel lesson where Jesus predicts the fall of Jerusalem was written much later, because they don't believe that

Jesus could have predicted the future. So it makes sense that they ignore the many warnings in God's Word against straying from his commandments. No humanly instituted church is too big to fail.

Jerusalem was not prepared for Christ's visitation and it met judgment. Are you prepared for Christ's visitation? Do you listen both to God's Law and his Gospel? Are you sorry for your sins and want to do better? Do you trust in Christ's forgiveness, his work, his word? Or do you trust in your own ability to get by? Do not be caught unprepared.

Just as God sent prophets to prepare Jerusalem for Christ's visitation, he sends us men to preach his word. Sometimes they preach peace, forgiveness in Christ, soothing balm to heal the crushed conscience. Sometimes they preach judgment, warning against immoral living and trusting in false gods, a mirror to drive the sinner to repentance. Both these words are necessary to prepare you for your visitation. A soul that trusts in itself and refuses correction must be crushed, so that it can receive Christ. A sinner must be killed by the law in order for him to be raised to new life by the gospel. A stricken conscience needs the gospel. A sinner who is sorry for his sins needs to hear that when Christ comes with trumpet sounds that he can raise his head, for his redemption is coming nigh. Without the Law the sinner will not accept the Gospel. A healthy person doesn't need a physician nor does a righteous person need to be forgiven. A sinner must be made a sinner by the Law. And without the Gospel Christ's visitation is terrifying. A sinner without the hope in God's forgiveness would run in terror at the coming of Christ.

So to be prepared for Christ's visitation, you need to hear God's Word, both Law and Gospel. This is how God has chosen to prepare his people.

The chief priests, scribes, and principal men of the city sought to destroy Jesus. What is ironic is that these same men waited for their visitation from God. They believed that God would send the Christ to save Israel. They thought that they would be ready. But they rejected God's prophets. And they refused to listen to Jesus. So also today there are many who claim to be Christians. They believe that they will be ready when Christ returns. But like the religious leaders of Jerusalem, they do not know God's Christ. Because they do not listen to his word.

Everytime God sent a prophet, he gave a foretaste of his visitation. If people rejected God's prophet, they would not receive God. So God sends us a foretaste of Christ's visitation. He sends us his Word. He baptizes us. He even visits us under the disguise of bread and wine to feed us his body and blood. When God baptizes, when he preaches, when he feeds you the Sacrament he is visiting you. God visits his people wherever the Word is taught in its truth and purity and where his Sacraments are rightly administered. He does this to prepare his people for their final visitation, when Christ will come to raise their heads and bring them to their eternal kingdom.

If in faith you receive God's visitation today in Word and Sacrament, you have the assurance from God that you are prepared to receive God's visitation on the Last Day. If you have received peace from God in the Gospel, you know that Christ comes in peace for you. Nothing on earth is too big to fail, but Christ's holy Church is not built on the foundation of stones or concrete, but on Christ and his Word. And Christ's Church will not be torn down, because Jesus was torn down for her. But unlike Jerusalem, Jesus rose invincible. When you dwell within the walls of the Church, the true Jerusalem, you are safe; from judgment, shame, and death. You are prepared for your visitation.

Amen.