

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*

Perhaps you recognize the poem by J.R.R. Tolkien that played an essential role in the first book in *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy: The Fellowship of the Ring*. In the book, the poem was a bit of wisdom shared by Gandalf to Frodo who was tasked with finding one of the most important characters in the trilogy, Aragorn, the true king of the land. According to Gandalf, it was going to be difficult to find Aragorn, not only because he went by another name, but because he didn't look or act like a stereotypical king.

Those who have read Tolkien's novels probably know he was a deeply religious man, and his religious beliefs often appear in his writing. This poem is an example. On one level it works for the story he wrote. On another level, many scholars believe it also could be about Christ. Today, it could also be a lovely way to sum up the Gospel reading that begins with people admiring the glittering beauty of the temple in Jerusalem.

Those who are familiar with Biblical history already know the temple in today's Gospel is a reconstruction of the one originally destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian Empire long before the events in the Gospel. The reconstructed temple is sometimes called the Second Temple, and it was more than a source of pride for the Jewish people. It was a source of joy and represented their relationship and connection to God. This temple has another name. It is also referred to as Herod's Temple because all its glittering features like gates made of silver and gold that were being admired in today's Gospel were part of the temple thanks to King Herod I

a.k.a. Herod the Great who was King of Judea under Roman occupation. Even though he wasn't Jewish by birth, Herod had been raised Jewish, but he was completely loyal to the Roman Empire who made him king of the Jews in Judea.

This little bit of condensed history might explain why Jesus responded the way he did when people started commenting on the impressive beauty of the temple. Instead of joining them in admiring the temple's grandeur, Jesus shared his wisdom that not all that is gold glitters; in other words, there is more to things and people than appearance, which can be distracting and easily misdirect us.

Instead of quoting a lovely poem, however, Jesus shares wisdom by predicting the impressive temple will meet the same fate as its predecessor. It, too, will be reduced to rubble. Again, the historians among us already know Jesus wasn't being dramatic or pessimistic. He was right. That temple was destroyed in the year 70 CE by the very empire that helped build it. The Roman Empire destroyed the temple in response to an on-going Jewish revolt.

Biblical scholars remind us Luke's Gospel was probably written when this historical event had already happened. Which could mean the author of Luke's Gospel is pointing out salvation will not come from the Roman Empire, or any empire or government. Despite what they promised, despite the time and resources they invested in the temple, the Roman Empire was willing to use its power to harm those who are not loyal to them. This also means the rebuilding of the temple could be interpreted as a political attempt to gain loyalty from the Jewish people instead of a sign of respect for their culture and religion.

Today's Gospel has Jesus reminding his listeners then and those of us listening today that in a world where there is much we cannot control, where the permanence of grand buildings is an illusion, and warns us there are people who will take advantage of the fear and confusion we might feel in times of crisis, sadness, or decline by promising to save us, if we let them do whatever they want. Jesus warns us to be wary of the people who offer false hope, easy answers, and proclaim to know how events will end when those events are still unfolding. None of us know how any day or week or month or year will end. None of us know how our lives will turn out, or the lives of a community or institution.

In times of uncertainty or change, can be comforting when someone steps into that unknowing and proclaims to have it all figured out. That is why we often hire consultants. Today's Gospel warns us such comfort is empty and we need to be careful that whenever we receive advice or consultation that we do not let that advice distract us from our mission as followers of Jesus. In today's Gospel Jesus did not talk about the end of the temple as a calamity that justified selfish or harmful

behavior. Jesus was not playing up drama to get power. Such behavior, he warned, is how we recognize someone who is a false prophet, someone who is not associated with him.

Instead, Jesus talks about enduring difficult times trusting that God is somehow at work, even if we can't recognize it. Events will unfold as they will, and despite our best-efforts things won't always go the way we envision, or plan, no matter what the highest paid consultants say. In his life, death, and resurrection Jesus showed us how even tragic events were opportunities for transformation of injustice into God's kingdom of love here on earth.

While it can be tempting to be anxiously pessimistic when things don't work out the way we want and throw up our hands or give up, today's Gospel reminds us there is another way, the Way of Love, the Way of Christ. This is the way of persevering in prayer, persevering in listening to the wisdom of Jesus through reading scriptures and other resources, persevering in caring for each other, persevering in the work of forgiveness, persevering in the work of being present to our neighborhood that shows God's love is at work even in the tough parts of life.

The Way of Love reminds us before we trust the person who offers us the easy solution to an on-going, complicated, difficult, or sad situation, we stop and consider the very place we might find God waiting for us is in the middle of that complicated, difficult situation. And in that encounter with God, we might experience a Kingdom of God transformation Jesus started with his death and resurrection.

The truth is there are, there always have been, and there will be things that are hard, unfair, unjust, challenging, difficult, and just wrong. However, today's Gospel reminds us those things are not evidence of God's absence. Quite the opposite. They just might be invitations to take a closer look, to be patient and persevere, because doing so could bring us closer to God at work transforming pain into love in the world where –

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