

For many people, this gospel lesson is terrifying. I mean, how can it not be? We get nervous reading and hearing it, pondering what calamities could have already occurred and which ones will occur. Is the end really near? Keep in mind that the gospel writer, Luke, was writing to the Christian community who was experiencing daily fear in their lives. Roman forces had destroyed their Temple, the holy place of God as an important symbol of their faith. It was a devastating loss for the community, both Jews and Christians. They felt their futures were grim. Luke's gospel reflects the fear and the uncertainty of the community at that time. He gives hope and promise to them, encouraging strong faith in Jesus Christ,

while telling them the worst is yet to come.

According to Jesus, the worst was definitely yet to come. He described the beautiful Temple being destroyed, a prophecy which had come true. He described wars and insurrections where nation will rise up against nation! Kingdom against kingdom. He described earthquakes and famines and plagues. There will be omens and great signs from heaven. And the affliction will become personal. You will be persecuted, handed over to the authorities because of your faith in Jesus Christ. You will be betrayed by those closest to you, hated because your faith. You may even be put to death.

And yet- for years and years and years after, anyone

who read or heard these words of Jesus were on edge.

Expecting the end of the world. Expecting and living through disaster and calamity. Looking to the sky to see if it is falling. Still experiencing hardship and loss. Years and years and years after. And especially today. Surely the world is ending because of this calamity and that calamity. It is terrifying!

And not only do we have the grim viewpoint of the world, we do of the church as well. The church has changed and is changing. We continue to hear reports of the death of the church- how fewer and fewer and fewer people are coming to church. The number of unchurched people is greater than those who attend church. It

doesn't sound very hopeful does it? The church is falling apart! The world is ending! It's terrifying!!

But honestly, calamity in the world and in the church has always been around. We didn't start the fire, it was always burning since the world's been turning. Billy Joel wrote this song in 1989 when he had just turned 40. He had been in a recording studio, when Sean Lennon (son of Beatle John Lennon) walked in and said "It's a terrible time to be 21!" John replied, "Yeah, I remember when I was 21- I thought it was an awful time and we had Vietnam, and y'know, drug problems, and civil rights problems and everything seemed to be awful." Sean then responded, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but it's different for

you. You were a kid in the fifties and everything knows that nothing happened in the fifties!" To which Billy Joel mentioned "Didn't you heard of the Korean War or the Suez Canal Crisis?" That's where he came up with the song- every verse lists headlines from each decade from 1949 (when he was born) to 1989...for instance...

Hemingway, Eichmann, "Stranger in a Strange Land", Dylan, Berlin, Bay of Pigs invasion..."Lawrence of Arabia", British Beatlemania, Ole Miss, John Glenn, Liston beats Patterson...Pope Paul, Malcolm X, British politician sex, Jfk, blown away what else do I have to say?

And

Wheel of Fortune, Sally Ride, heavy metal, suicide, foreign

debts, homeless vets, AIDS, crack, Bernie Goetz,
hypodermics on the shores, China's under martial law,
rock and roller cola wars, I can't take it anymore! We
didn't start the fire, it was always burning since the worlds
been turning, we didn't start the fire, no we didn't light it
but we tried to fight it...

Hardship, calamity, destruction are never-ending. The
world continues to change. The church continues to
change. Church buildings crumble. People die. We
struggle. We look to the sky for signs. Is this the end?

Even though Luke was writing to the Christian
community who had just experienced hardship and loss,
this text still applies today. We experience hardship and

loss. We experience calamity: wars still occur. The world is still ending! We go through so much- we have throughout history.

Troops continue to be sent overseas. Dangers are still among us. Natural disasters still occur, not only in the US, but worldwide, causing destruction and heartache. Just turning on the news, we can't avoid watching daily calamities as we hear about another school shooting, another murder, another child molestation case and more. It's disheartening and we see how easy it is to lose hope. How can we not? Where is there any hope in this world??? Seriously???

Well, be assured that Jesus wasn't just giving an

account of the destruction that was to come, Jesus was also giving us a very important and valuable reminder: do not be terrified. God is with us. We are not in this alone. He says "when you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified." When you hear of hurricanes and frigid winters to come, do not be terrified. When you hear of earthquakes, do not be terrified. When you hear statistics of churches closing and people leaving, do not be terrified. Through all of your daily hardships, do not be terrified. When your faith is tested and challenged, do not be terrified. We are not alone. God is with us and we have hope in this. And while we are enduring calamity, it will be tempting to turn our faith and focus on things

other than God, who is our hope and salvation. Jesus warns us against false prophets and those things that will lead us astray. Hope is only found through God in Jesus Christ.

During a calamity and shortly thereafter, it may be hard to see God's activity. It may be easy to lose hope. But God is there. After a disaster, after a shooting, after a devastating life event, I love hearing about the hope that comes out of that. I remember after Hurricane Katrina, countless people came to New Orleans for relief efforts not only in the month following, but for years following, offering money, building houses, distributing food, caring for those who were suffering from traumatic stress and

needed counseling. The same goes for victims of the earthquake in Haiti or the tornado in Moore, OK, the hurricanes in Houston and Puerto Rico, and the fires in Los Angeles. People aren't forgotten.

Hope came in these situations. And God was present and still is present in relief workers, in counselors, in volunteers, in builders, in neighbors and friends and family that offer hope to anyone affected by any sort of devastation. God will not turn away from his people especially when we are in need. He is the only one who can save us. And because of this, we should trust him and put our faith in him especially when times are difficult.

God knows of the calamity that have occurred

throughout history and will occur in our lives. And he is there for you offering hope- he is there in the neighbor who fixes a meal for you, or a friend you drops by to see if everything is ok. Or God offers hope through a sunshine filled afternoon, after weeks of clouds and rain and snow. God offers hope through Jesus Christ who came to us to die for our sins.

This gospel text may not seem that hopeful...after all, Jesus has warned us of grim times ahead. As has happened throughout the millennia, some of us may be feeling that these times are now. But Jesus reminds us, "Do not be terrified!" We should not be terrified! That is the promise we need to cling to. God will see us through

it because he will never leave us. He is our only hope and promise of salvation.