

Text: Luke 2: 5-19

Theme: Series-Prepare for the King: Signs of the Times

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word /Remembrance Sunday on 13/11/2016 at 10.30am

Have you ever tried to make a prediction? Here are some predictions from the past. All from people who were trusted individuals:

There was an inventor by the name of Lee DeForest. He claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

The Decca Recording Co. made a big mistake when they made this prediction: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." That was their prediction in 1962 concerning a few lads from Liverpool. Their band was called the Beatles.

The odds that Trump would win the American Presidency by the bookies was 150:1 but he is now the President elect.

Last year, those of you who are football-minded would not have considered the struggling and unknown Leicester team a favourite to win the premiership league, but it did.

How about Brexit? Who would have thought that Britain would vote the way it did? David Cameron was sure he had done his Maths well to the extent that he put his political future on the line. Today, we have a new Prime Minister.

Verses 5-7

As the disciples walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus paused with his disciples, looked back at the Temple and predicted, "Do you see all these great buildings. Not one stone will be left on another." To the disciples this was unimaginable. Nothing could bring down these walls. "Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" they said to Jesus.

The temple wasn't just big, it was also beautiful. The Jewish historian Josephus said that the temple was covered on the outside with gold plates, that were so brilliant that when the sun shone on them, it was blinding to look at. Where there was no gold, there were blocks of marble of such a pure white that from a distance travellers thought there was snow on the temple mount.

However, as great as the temple was, Jesus never hesitated to claim that He was greater than the temple (Matthew 12:5). For many Jews of that day, the temple had become an idol – it began to mean more to the people than God Himself did. You can then understand the disciples surprise.

Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be levelled to the ground seemed implausible. But they pressed Jesus for more information. They wanted to know when. What would be the sign that this was about to take place. In their voice was fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear that their lives were about to change forever. Fear that their world was going to fall apart. Fear that the whole world was going to fall apart.

Jesus invites those who can hear him, don't anchor your faith in these stones, but in the one who rolls away the stone.

So, what do you do when the world and your world are falling apart?

The temple might look pretty on the outside, but it is pretty empty on the inside. The temple system was falling apart; Jesus the Lamb of God would soon be sacrificed and there was no

need for temple rituals as it was practised. Yet most could not see it. The fact is, in 40 years, about 70 A.D., most of Jerusalem was destroyed.

The disciples' questions were no different than ours would be today. When will this all happen? How will we know when these things will take place? What sign should we look for? It is a question people still ask today.

Verse 8

Jesus does not directly answer their question. Instead He paints a picture, with all the usual elements: warring nations, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, plagues, and ... dreadful portents. It is easy to hear this text and either be overwhelmed by all the apocalyptic imagery or to ignore it altogether.

I imagine, that many of us have wondered if our world is not falling apart before our very eyes. We are still living with the effects of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Terrorist attacks have not abated in the world. Wars, Hurricanes, Tsunamis and earthquakes. Possibly one of the strongest weather fronts in known human history smashed into the Philippines and Caribbean's recently. Haiti is still to recover from the devastations of Hurricane Matthew.

And it is not only the world that seems to be falling apart, but the world-wide Christian church also. Some who call themselves Christians are denying the Deity and Saving power of Christ. Beloved ... when doctrine and truth are abandoned...You do not get liberal Christianity, you have formed a whole new humanistic religion. (Pause)

So, how do we act as followers of the Christ in these trying times?

In our Gospel reading **the real focus of Jesus' words is not on the end of the world itself or on the signs that accompany it. The focus is on what it will mean for the followers of Jesus.**

The disciples want to know ... when these things will occur. They want to be ... in the know. Instead, ... Jesus tells them what Not to do when the world seems to be falling apart

Jesus assured his disciples of trying times ahead. He counselled them on what not to do when they find themselves on trial, when they are persecuted. Most of us have not had the experience of being hated and persecuted for being followers of the Christ, which is now the case in many parts of the world. But we All know that in small, and in sometimes big ways, following Jesus will often put us at odds with the values of this world, and at times, the values of our friends and even our own families. The truth is our faith is on trial every single day of our life.

And we are most susceptible to fail when tragedy and stress come to call. So, what do you do when your world is falling apart?

Jesus offers these directives to his disciples:

- 1. Do not be led astray by false promises; Do not be anxious;**
- 2. Do not be terrified; Do not look for quick fixes;**
- 3. Do not prepare your defence in advance...**

Yet sadly, when the world is falling apart, most people, Christian or not, end up doing the exact things. Jesus states not to do. We become anxious. We seek a quick fix to lift our burden. We excessively worry. And we seek in our mind a defence or retribution against those who have caused the hurt we are experiencing.

But the question that Jesus poses to his disciples and to us is not, "How you will react to and survive these times?" His question is: What will be your witness?

Verses 12 -15

When times are trying and they will be, what will be your witness? Did you hear that line in the gospel reading, where Jesus uses the word opportunity? (verse 13)

He says that ALL of this, the crumbling of our worlds and the trials that come with it will... result in your being witnesses: it will give you an opportunity to testify, to witness.

Usually when we think of an opportunity, we think of something new, of something good. We speak of an opportunity for a new job or a new call. We say things like, that is a good opportunity for her or that is a wonderful opportunity for him.

We usually do not think of earthquakes, wars, and trials as opportunities. But Jesus does. He wants us to testify. He wants us to share our story. To share how Jesus impacts our lives. How he has transformed us into a new creation. How our relationship with Jesus helps us to cope and be joyful even when battling with the tempests of life.

This is your opportunity to testify; I'll give you the words and wisdom. In Luke, Jesus isn't saying, "look for the silver lining when the stones come down." It's not a glib faith that looks for the good when everything around you fail. Jesus isn't that smug. But he does say: "this is your opportunity to testify." To say and live what you really believe, deep down. To practice that our faith is not in our buildings, but in our God.

The word, *testify* is the same Greek word which translates as witness. That means to show with your word, your actions and your life to whom your Real allegiance lie; Where the foundation of your faith truly lies. Do you believe Jesus is who he says he is?

Do your words and your actions portray that Jesus is Lord of your life? of every aspect of your life? To Testify means to point to the Real foundation on which you stand ... which under-girds your very being. It means to stand in the promise of that love, ... no matter what the world has laid before you.

I don't know what's ahead for our country, or our church, or your roof, or for any of us tomorrow. All I have is this strange promise from Jesus inviting us to relax a bit, to stop our frantic preparations, to "make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance. **I will give you words and wisdom.**" **I will be with you even to the end of the age. I think that is the promise that our forbearers in the faith clung to as well. May this promise be the rock to which you cling through the storms ahead. Amen.**