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LEARNING TO TRUST

2 Before Advent (C) - 16.11.2025

Malachi 4:1-2a | Psalm 98 | 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 | Luke 21:5-19

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. (Cf. Psalm 19:14)

SERMON

I. THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

Dear friends in Christ,

Whenever I work on a sermon, talk, or presentation, I strive to be prepared as well as possible. My preparation involves, among other things, contemplating a timetable, preparing handouts, writing a good manuscript, imagining the talk with consideration for the expected audience, and sometimes even planning the appropriate outfit. However, unexpected events often occur, leading to outcomes that differ from what was anticipated: participants come too late, or the projector is not working. Many times I had to learn that the imagination of a talk and the reality are two different things. That doesn't mean that the result of a presentation has to be necessarily undesirable. But the outcome almost always differs from the expectation. One can prepare quite well, but ultimately, nobody can predict the future, and you cannot control the outcome in detail. In the end, you must trust the moment and lean into the ongoing process of a talk.

II. THE DANGER OF FALSE STRATEGIES

This experience matters because it is not only true when planning a presentation but also in other situations in today's world. We are living in a complex world of multiple crises, and many things are unpredictable and sometimes even frustratingly uncontrollable. Perhaps you are familiar with this feeling, particularly in the light of the political and social atmosphere in many countries of the world today. Sometimes, it may be difficult to understand what is happening, leading you to feel that the world is going mad.

For many, it is frightening to live in this uncertain environment. Climate change, migration, political instability, wars, conflicts, inflation, and religious intolerance are just a few of the issues that worry people in today's world. Today's world is often too complex to maintain a clear overview of information. Therefore, many people try to control their lives and worry about many things.

And human beings have different strategies to react to today's world. Some just feel lost and overwhelmed, and they lose hope. Others attempt to control the world by oversimplifying reality and its associated problems with far too simplistic answers and solutions. Sometimes people are looking to a glorified past that seems to be much better and more desirable than the present reality. Many of these strategies do not work well.

III. TRUSTING IN A REASONABLE WAY AS A BIBLICAL SUGGESTION

Dear friends in Christ,

What do we need to do in the context of today's uncontrollable reality?

First of all, we are not the first generation that faces a world in crisis. The liturgical time between All Saints Day and Advent, when our lectionary suggests texts that reflect the end of time, shows very clearly that the world was and is regularly in crisis. Indeed, the world has been in a state of crisis since the beginning of creation.

Today's gospel reading talks about a world in crisis as well. The text reflects the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. A Jewish revolt against the Roman occupation led to the destruction of the Second Temple under the reign of the Roman emperor Titus. Jerusalem was besieged and captured. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and killed, enslaved, or displaced its inhabitants. In Rome, you can still see on one of the triumphal arches a sculpture of a triumphal procession where the Roman army brought the menorah, the lampstand from the temple in Jerusalem, and other cultic artefacts into the capital city of the Roman Empire. It was a time of crisis. People were in fear. And for the early Christians it must have been quite a frightening experience. Orientation and direction were crucial in this scenario.¹

In this situation of instability, war, and violence, the whole 21st chapter of the Gospel of Luke offers advice to the early Christian community in Jerusalem. Today's gospel reading is a part of that chapter. Jesus, who predicted the destruction of the temple, offers guidance on proper conduct in this time of crisis and uncertainty.

Jesus advises not to follow false leaders who make false promises. He asks not to be frightened by the events, because they are not the end. Because at the end, in the kingdom of God, there will be peace and justice. However, the events indicate that an end is approaching. And the end will lead to a positive transformation. Yes, even in the midst of that mess there is hope for the future. Therefore, it is beneficial to take heart at the coming redemption. His followers should not worry too much about defences in times of persecution and trial. Perseverance and a firm stand are important. But a realistic view and foresight are nonetheless advantageous. And in all that instability there is one anchor:

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(70_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE))

God's word and guidance. Jesus' advice is to learn to have reasonable trust in a time of crisis and uncertainty. Reason and trust, watching and praying are all important.

This part of the gospel is an exhortation to trust in God through times of crisis. The point is made clear in this passage, just a few verses after today's gospel reading: "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28)

IV. THE DIVINE PROMISE OF GRACE

Luke's gospel also offers cause for trust and hope in God, even in the face of persecution. We read: "So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict." (Luke 21:14-15) That means God will help us in difficult times.

Theologians call that kind of help "Actual Grace". That is a preventive grace. In tangible and challenging circumstances, "Actual Grace" helps to act according to God's will.

That is also explained as follows in the Book of Common Prayer: "The condition of Man after the fall of *Adam* is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God. without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that goodwill." (Articles of Religion, Article X) In reality, we can't act according to God's will without grace. And we can and should trust in God's help

In addition, there is another reason to have faith. We have the hope that God will judge justly at the end of times. The madness of today's world is not the final word. As we sang together in Psalm 98: "He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity." (Psalm 98:8)

V. A PICTURE OF FAITH

Let me conclude with a stunning picture that can serve as a reminder to trust in God: The Creation of Adam, by Michelangelo. Our weekly wrap has it on the front. The original, a fresco, is located in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.

The picture shows Adam, lying on the ground and stretching his arm and pointing his finger towards God. God is, in a way, flying above Adam and pointing with his finger to Adam's finger. Remarkable is that both fingers don't touch each other. There is a minimal gap between God and Adam. Some say that it's just 1.9 centimetres. Well, I can't verify that. But I have seen the original one. And I can confirm that it is indeed a very small gap. There are different interpretations. Some say that Michelangelo wanted to paint the moment just before the touching of both hands. Others say that the gap transports the message that human beings can't reach the perfection of God. Humans are created in the image of God, but a very small gap remains.

This interpretation supports our reflections of actual grace. As humans, we are imperfect , and we require God's assistance to overcome our imperfections. God offers that help and assistance out of love for his creation. As flawed and frail human beings, we can and ought to have faith in God's grace. Because grace is the touch that closes the gap between God and us.

PRAYER

Let me pray.

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
The courage, to change the things I can;
And the wisdom, to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.²

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² <https://benjaminhcheever.com/quote-7-2/>