

A Bad Word, But a Good Word Too Luke 21:5-19

“Mom, you said a *bad word*.”

I sat in the front seat of the car,
trying to remember
what exactly I had just said.
It was raining.
It was cold.
I had been trying to maneuver myself
into the driver’s seat,
put a wet, large, golf umbrella
in the passenger seat
and put my water bottle in the cupholder
—all at the same time.

(You all know me) The ‘*bad word*’ could have been
any number of words.

“Mom, you just said, hate.”
As in, *I hate this weather*.
Couldn’t have been a lot worse...
if I do say so myself.



So yes,
Jesus uses a bad word.
He and the disciples
are at the temple in Jerusalem
and this chapter
is the last scene
of Jesus’ public ministry in Luke.¹
Someone passing by,

¹ Paul D. Duke, Ruined Temples, Christian Century, November 1, 1995

maybe a pilgrim stopping to take it all in,
remarks at how lovely the Temple is
in the afternoon light.
And Jesus lets loose
a whole slew of apocalyptic warnings.

‘Every stone will be thrown down;
don’t be led astray;
watch for the signs!
And of top of all that,
(he’s really fired up about this;)
he uses a bad word,
“you will be hated by all
because of my name.”

I don’t know about you,
but I’ve never really been hated
because of my faith.
Though more recently
I am sometimes hesitant
to reveal what I do for a living,
because of extremists on both sides
of the Christian spectrum.
I find I am quick to justify myself
by saying,
“but I’m not *that* kind of pastor
or *that* kind of Christian...”
But even that is hardly being hated.
It’s more that I’m fearful
of being disliked
—or misrepresented.

We can’t say with absolute certainty
what Jesus might have meant
by that statement,
that we will be hated by everyone because of him,
but we can make a good guess.

Luke has Jesus talking to *the disciples of then,*

who were in the midst
of being persecuted.
Rome did not like the threat of this new 'way'
that became a direct opposition to the
imperial religion and social order of the day.

The disciples of then
knew what it was like
for their synagogues to be ruined,
to be thrown to lions,
to suffer, to be outcasts.
But the words are still true for *the disciples of now*.

Hate usually rears its head
when things are important.
I don't really hate rainy cold weather,
but I do hate the reality of people and animals
having no place to go
when the temperature drops below freezing at night.

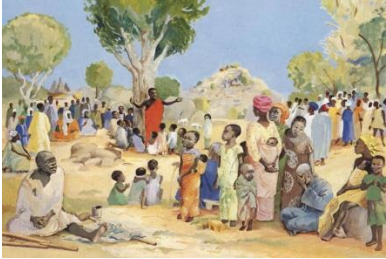
I don't really hate the stop light
at the end of my street,
that is timed so disproportionately
that only a few cars
can go at a time in one direction.

But I do hate that local and state law makers
would prioritize a traffic flow
that encourages business profit
over the safety of children
in neighbors with busy streets.

We tend to get really fired up about things
that we hold close to our hearts.
It's the big stuff—our safety,
our well-being,
our religion,
that's when we might use a bad word
like *hate*.

And what's funny is that isn't a bad word
or a bad feeling at all.

When we stand on the side of justice,
we have to expect
a little hate thrown in our direction.



When we are acting
on behalf of the poor and forgotten,
the widows, the orphans,
the minorities, the stranger and outcast,
you better expect some hate
slung at you from all sides.

Remember,
the church is supposed to be a **truth-teller**,
a community that does not flinch
from naming sin and atrocity²
and then doing something about it.
If we were more like that,
I think we would expect
a lot of people might hate us.

Here in Jesus' last public sermon
his message continues what Luke started
way back in the first chapter of the gospel
in Mary's song.
The world is going to be turned upside by Jesus;
and there just no pleasant, nice, discreet way
about it.³

The upside-down way will be victorious,
my disciples,

² Walter Brueggemann, The Terrible Ungluing, Christian Century, October 21, 1992

³ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/11/13/new-heavens-new-earth-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-twenty-third-week-after-pentecost>

but not like you think.
Not in the chariot riding,
sword wielding, bring the cavalry kind of way
—it will actually be much harder
on the body and the soul
and more grief inducing
—a different Calvary altogether.

This turning of the world upside down
will be painful.

You will suffer, Jesus is trying to say;
you will see heartbreaking things;
you will be poured out,
exhausted and mistreated.

You should expect, Jesus warns,
that your most treasured places
will be burned down and torn apart,
the foundations demolished.

“But before all this occurs,
they will arrest you and persecute you;
they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons,
and you will be brought before kings and governors
because of my name.”

Haters gonna hate.

Hardly the sermon the disciples wanted to hear
or perhaps even expected to hear.

Sitting there on the Temple steps,
Jesus claims every stone will be thrown down
—and what would that mean for them?
The Temple is where God dwells
—does God fall with the Temple?



Paul Duke, a Baptist pastor in Missouri writes,
“Jesus didn’t have to be clairvoyant
to make this prediction
 (of the Temple’s demise).
Every temple is a doomed house.
Every structure and system
 for housing the holy
 will wear out its use,
 will disappoint and die.
Name any temple you like,
 any ground that is sacred to us
because at one time or another
 God met us there:
 a church, a denomination,
 a neighborhood, family, friendship,
 vocation, passion,
 memory or dream
 —they all have a lifespan
 and they all come to an end.”⁴

I don’t really need to elaborate to you
 about this text’s apocalyptic nature;
 all these endings pointed out in Luke.
 Though Jesus names things like,
 earthquakes,
 famine,
 plagues,
 wars
 —you know too much
 about those things already.

⁴ Paul D. Duke, Ruined Temples, Christian Century, November 1, 1995

They aren't ancient signs:
we are plagued in equal parts
by extreme busyness and devastating loneliness;
there is a famine of quality relationships
and strong bonds within our communities;
our nation is at war with itself.

These aren't ancient signs,
they are our talk shows,
podcasts and morning headlines.

Our eco system is trembling and shaking,
oceans rise along with temperatures,
wildfires burn forests and homes
and our oldest glaciers melt away.

We know about endings.
Empires fall and so do institutions.

This turning Mary sings of,
this great reversal
where the powerful are overturned
and the poor and downtrodden are lifted up,
these dreadful portents and signs in the heavens,
that Jesus foretells,
they are all in fact signs of the end.

“As for these things that you see,
the days will come
when not one stone will be left upon another;
all will be thrown down.”



I've seen the stones from the temple.
They were in fact thrown down.
And then left there

as a reminder of what once was.
“In our age, the landscape is lit up
with burning temples.
The temple of communism has fallen;
the temple of capitalism is on fire.
The temple of technology
is tilting like the tower of Babel.”⁵

As Carol Ann said,
“Oh, this is a nice light
bible reading this week,”
Exactly.

Yes, these are signs of the end.
The end and the apocalypse
that has been happening
again, and again for thousands of years.
The end of the world revisits us over and over.⁶

But what Jesus teaches us
is the end must come
for something new to begin.
The great reversal cannot take place
with the old ways still intact.
Everything must come down.
“Our temples fall
so that fresh forms of faith
can rise from the ruins.”⁷

Jesus isn't using scare theology⁸
rather Jesus is telling his *disciples then*
and his *disciples now*,
this is how you will survive
the hatred of the world,
the result of my turning everything upside down;
this is how you will survive
the end of the former things

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, The Terrible Ungluing, Christian Century, October 21, 1992

—in order to embrace the new things, I am doing.

In order to prepare for the end:

Jesus forbids naivete, *see that you are not misled.*

Jesus forbids despair, *do not be terrified.*

He instructs improvisation

(and inspires creativity), *do not prepare your defenses in advance.*

He encourages trust, *I will give you words and wisdom.*

He avows stubborn hope, *By your endurance you will save your souls.*⁹

This is how God's people

will come through the end.

This is how they have always survived the end.

Even in martyrdom.



“Luke begins his Gospel

with Mary singing that God's mission
is to “lift up the lowly,”

“scatter the proud

in the thoughts of their hearts,”

and “bring down the powerful
from their thrones”.

And here, in Jesus' last sermon,

we confront the difficult truth

that this world-turning work

will involve struggle and loss,

trials and adversity.

Jesus's passion is about to begin

and will lead him to [death.]¹⁰

⁹ Paul D. Duke, Ruined Temples, Christian Century, November 1, 1995

¹⁰ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/11/13/new-heavens-new-earth-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-twenty-third-week-after-pentecost>

But that isn't the end.

It was never the end.

It was death.

But it was life.

It was suffering.

But it was strength.

There were storms, earthquakes and torn curtains.

But the earth itself

knew to cry out for her creator.

This is meant to be some comfort for us,

people of faith

who struggle to stand on the side of justice

and not the side of power;

for those of us who are faithful

but stand in a place of privilege and freedom

and often do not share those blessings

with others well;

This is for those of us

who read these words and shudder,

like this is bad word,

but it is not.

“How ironic that a passage

that makes some people unsettled—

even as the disciples were initially

unsettled to hear Jesus

predict the destruction of the Temple

—is actually meant to *settle* us in our faith

and re-assure us...

That may not be an easy message

to hear but it is one

we may need to hear anyway.”¹¹

This word is a good word,

it is good news.

Jesus's words aren't just to anyone

¹¹ Scott Hoezee https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-28c-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel

whose temple happens to fall down,
but those who have **the courage**
to leave the old ruins of old systems
and bear new faith
and the new persecutions
that go along with it.¹²

Can we be faithful enough
to read these signs for what they are?
Signs of the end.
Signs of the world being turned upside down.

As we hold on,
in some cases, clutching for dear life,
can we, “remain encouraged,
trusting that Mary’s song
is unfolding all around us.”¹³
can we bear this newness among the old ruins?

I believe and have stubborn hope
that we can...
and I’d **hate** to think otherwise.

¹² Paul D. Duke, Ruined Temples, Christian Century, November 1, 1995

¹³ ¹³ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/11/13/new-heavens-new-earth-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-twenty-third-week-after-pentecost>