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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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Luke 21:5-19

Small children are afraid of the dark. No matter all the talk reminding there are no monsters or ghosts. There is nothing to be frightened of under the bed, in the closet, or down the hall. Every night, parental-types have the same conversation, even though there is nothing to be afraid of.

Yet when the darkness falls, and bedtime comes all over the world, the same conversations occur. We've tried it all, prayers to guardian angels, closing the closet doors, stomping our feet and saying going away monsters, (stomp- stomp), go away monsters, (stomp- stomp). My sister invented Monster Be Gone Spray, and my mother had a monster away wand. There are all kinds of ways to try to keep away the things that frighten us at bay, but despite our best

efforts, there is always something to be afraid of.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is teaching in the Temple. He is standing in the most magnificent building in all of Jerusalem, perhaps in all of the known world at the time and saying- this building isn't just going to fall down, it is going to be torn down, all that you see will no longer exist. But don't freak out. It's all going according to plan.

I don't know about you, but if someone walked into this building right now and said, "Well the ceiling is going to cave in. The windows are going to crack and shatter. This place where you have invested so much time, and money won't be around anymore. Don't worry, that's all according to plan." I would definitely worry, and I would definitely freak out. I would definitely feel like that was not according to my plan.

But here's the thing, God isn't standing in heaven with a cigar in his mouth like Hannibal from the A-Team saying, "I love it

when a plan comes together,” while the Temple crumbles, earthquakes rattle the foundations, and fire and brimstone rain down from the heavens. That is not the prophecy that Jesus gives. Luke’s prophetic Christ is one that we can recognize in every generation. All the things that humanity builds are temporary. All the greatest of our accomplishments are ephemeral. Whether it is something that is a fad like slap bracelets, moon shoes, fidget spinners, or whatever the “hottest thing” is that comes out this holiday season. Technological advancements will inevitably be replaced by the next big thing. Humanity has a tendency to always strive to outpace the previous version of itself.

Jesus tells us not to be afraid because while the glory of this world will pass away, it will make way for a future which we cannot yet imagine.

Here’s the thing about most people’s imaginations- most of us live in a state of imagined fear rather than imagined hope.

Many will say that this is because pessimists and optimists are in our midst.

I think that there is actually more nuanced than this. I think it is more about understanding our fears, acknowledging them, and living courageously anyway. I imagine that if Jesus were speaking to our generation, he wouldn’t be saying “do not be afraid”; rather, he would be saying “be brave” - feel the fear and do it anyway.

I have recently had the chance to show my children in an obvious demonstrable way that you can be afraid of something and still face it. You should first know that I am scared of heights, have been for as long as I can remember, which might be odd considering I am almost 6 foot tall, but there you have it.

A few weeks ago, when we were driving to Pennsylvania for my grandfather’s funeral because of traffic and weather, we were diverted off of I95 to a different course, which took us over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. I hate this bridge, I hate to be a passenger

driving over it, and even when my beloved husband drives it, I tend to read a book, focus on knitting or basically keep my head down between my knees. My kids have seen me do this every year of their lives as we vacation at the Delaware seashore.

This day as we approached the bridge, I am driving, and Audrey notices. Quietly she says, "Mama, you're scared of bridges." I reply, "Yes, yes, I am." I grasp the steering wheel a little tighter take a deep breath and say, "But mama can do hard things, Baby." and when we crossed the bridge she ecstatically yelled, "You did it, Mama, you did it!" In that instant, I felt elated, scared, and proud simultaneously. But I think the best way to describe it was that I was brave.

Now I've done a lot of reading on bravery in the past few years, I've devoured the work of Brene' Brown, I've watched her ted talks, and her Netflix special, I've even thought about enrolling in some of her courses, but the timing isn't right for me now with the two

small children at home. Perhaps someday that will come to be, but for me, what I have learned from Brene' Brown and what I learned from Jesus about fear is pretty much the same thing. Don't let fear control the narrative. Brown's work shows how, why, and what, to do to combat fear that can swamp us. I think of Brene Brown as my grown-up night light. When I find myself sitting up at night wondering and worrying about the what-ifs, I often find myself thinking, what would Brene' say in this situation. Am I focusing on fear or hope, am I focusing on scarcity or abundance, and I being daring or am I submissive? When I find my answers to be fear, scarcity, and submission, I do my best to shift my perspective and find hope, abundance, and daring choices.

No one can do this all the time on their own. This is the great thing about being part of a community of like-minded believers. We can recognize when we speak to one another out of fear or anxiety or doubt, and in those

moments, we ought to be able to call one another into a loving conversation. When these kinds of worries are voiced. When these doubts arise, and we do not acknowledge them, then they become like the boogie-men hiding in the dark recesses of our bedroom closet.

Right now, in this parish, we are in a period of a lot of unknowns, it is an interim period, and while Bill is great, we know he will only be here for a short time. After a long tenure with Bo preceded by an even longer tenure with Hill, we find ourselves wondering who we are and what God wants from us in this time and at this place, and it can be unnerving, to say the least. Knowing what mainline denominations like our own acknowledge about the “nones and dones” about the “death tsunami” decreases in pledges, and membership, and all these things that point to the death of the institutional church it is hard not to wonder will GHTC survive into the 22nd century? What will this place look like in 10, 20, 30

years? Will this building even exist for my children’s children’s children?

It is a good and joyful thing to have these questions, to plan for the future, and to consider if who we were and who we are is the same as what God is calling us to be? But we need not have answers to these questions right now, and if we do not have answers to these questions, that does not mean that we need to panic.

Remember Jesus standing in the Temple telling the disciples about earthquakes and floods, and famines and plagues? What did the disciples do? They panicked. When will this come to be, Lord, how can we prepare. I can almost see them doomsday prepping, getting their go-bags, and heading for higher ground. Save yourselves, and we will meet you in the promised land.

Jesus doesn’t want us to be worried about the earthly things, the temples build with human hands, the stones upon stones, Jesus wants us to recognize the temporal nature of

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all the things that surround us and put our faith in things eternal.

What that looks like - I'm not exactly sure- honestly- it is part of why I accepted the call to ordination at this time and in this place, because as a 30 something-year-old priest who plans to have a life long career in ministry the future of the church is what excites me. Not that I don't love the present- you've heard me say it before, I love you all, but God loves you more, and God is doing more in your lives and in our life together than I have even the slightest understanding of. But it's pretty darn scary too. It can feel a bit like we are white-knuckling it through this time of transition. But I know that we can do scary things, and we can be brave, and when we get through this moment of anxiety and fear on the other side, we will celebrate and say - we can do hard things.

So it is a blessing that today we will get to talk about that in our interim conversation, what are some of the hard things that God is

calling us to do right now? What does our future hold? Fear not beloved, and be brave. Be brave.

Amen