

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible and newspaper front page at the center of your group. Pray the World Peace Prayer from the Hindu Upanishads. Half the group leads; half responds.

Lead us from death to life,
From falsehood to truth,
From despair to hope,
From fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love,
From war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts.
Let peace fill our world.
Let peace fill our universe.

The pandemic affects humans around the globe. Covid mutates, creating new threats as it travels the Earth. The very capacity within molecules to evolve and become more goes to work against us in this mutating threat.

As if the pandemic were not enough, we in our gas and coal-powered civilizations keep generating carbon to raise the global temperature. We are sweating through new temperature highs and watching the spread of drought spread across the West.

Hurricanes pound the East Coast and the Gulf Coast. New records of rainfall flood towns and even the New York subway. People must rethink where they can build. In the oceans people may have to leave their island homes.

Heat, rain, blizzards, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes—most people have experienced and

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

survived such destructive forces. Now our human impact on the climate threatens life as we know it on our planet home.

At the end and beginning of the liturgical year, the Church reads from the apocalyptic chapters in the gospels. This brings us scary gospels that promise good will win out in the end, but in the meantime, Jesus warns his disciples that wars, earthquakes, famines, and persecutions will happen. However, he also insists that we, his followers, have the wisdom we the need to endure.

Indeed, tragedies bring out the best in most of us. Families, neighbors, volunteer groups turn out to help, to love their neighbors as themselves. José Andrés arrived four days after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in September 2017. He set to work serving meals that in the end totaled 3.8 million in number.

Those who rushed to fight the fires and looked for bodies after

9/11 put their lives on the line. Some are now suffering lethal cancers from the toxins in the air and debris.

Stephen J. Gould helps us remember—“Good and kind people outnumber all the others by thousands to one. The tragedy of human history lies in the enormous potential for destruction in rare acts of evil, not in the high frequency of evil people... Thus in what I like to call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by ten thousand acts of kindness ... the ‘ordinary’ efforts of the vast majority” (*Harvard Magazine*, July-August, 2019, 72).

Jesus recommends patient endurance. He has taught us how to live every day. Indeed every tragedy catches individuals in the midst of doing good, saving someone besides themselves, rescuing neighbors, helping the disabled, helping clear away wreckage.

Christianity is about the verbs of everyday living: love, share, forgive, include, speak the truth, listen, learn, build, rejoice, have compassion, go an extra mile, lend a hand.

● **What is your prayer for your children? What is your advice?**



GOSPEL

Endure in faith.

NARRATOR: Some people were talking about the temple and how it was adorned with precious stones and votive offerings.

JESUS: These things you are talking about—the day will come when not one stone will be left on another that will not be torn down.

PEOPLE: When will this occur, Teacher? And what will be the sign it is going to happen?

JESUS 1: Take care not to be misled. Many will come in my name, saying, “I am he,” and, “The time is at hand.” Do not run after them.

JESUS 2: When you hear of wars and rebellions, don’t be terrified. These things must happen first, but the end will not follow at once. Nations will rise against nations and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, plagues, and famines, and in the sky dreadful omens and great signs.

JESUS 3: But before any of this, people will lay their hands on you



and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and prisons and bring you to trial before rulers and governors, all because of my name. You will be brought to give witness on account of me. So make up your minds not to worry about your defense beforehand, for I will give you words and a wisdom which none of your adversaries can take exception to or contradict.

JESUS 4: You will be handed over even by your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and some of you will be put to death. All will hate you because of me, yet not a hair of your head will be harmed. By patient endurance you will save your lives.

Luke 21:5-19

time Luke writes in the A.D. 80s, Christians anticipate a long delay before the end; in fact, Luke writes a second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, to tell the history of the Church as a sequel to Jesus’ own ministry. Acts sees the first Christian communities as models for all Christians in the long time between Jesus’ first and second comings.

Sunday’s gospel comes from the section of Luke that takes place in Jerusalem at the temple. Stones are a motif in this section

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in Luke 19:28. When welcoming crowds cry out, “Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord,” some Pharisees in the crowd tell Jesus to stop his disciples. “If they are silent,” Jesus says, “The stones will cry out.”

Luke 20:17 tells us Jesus is the stone the builders rejected that has become the cornerstone of a new temple. This verse sees in Jesus the sure foundation of faith that the prophet Isaiah once saw in the temple and the Davidic kings.

*Thus says the Lord,
See, I am laying a stone in Zion,
a stone that has been tested,
a precious cornerstone
as a sure foundation.
Those who put their faith in it
shall not be shaken (Isaiah 28:16).*

For Luke, Jesus, who was rejected as Messiah and put to death, has risen and become the cornerstone of a new community. Those who believe in Jesus are living stones in the new temple, the Christian community.

How do we interpret our times?

In A.D. 70, forty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Tenth Legion put down a four-year Jewish rebellion against Roman rule. The soldiers destroyed the temple and city of Jerusalem, and in doing so, ended temple-centered worship with its animal and grain offerings for all time.

This upheaval destroyed Israel’s religious center. This profound change demanded interpretation.

The temple, Israel’s second, was built about 500 B.C. King Herod

was restoring and refurbishing it during Jesus’ lifetime. No third temple was ever built. All that remains today of the second temple are foundation stones, which contemporary Jews regard as their holiest place—the Western Wall. They have made a holy place out of a place of tragedy just as the World Trade Center Memorial does.

Many Christians interpreted these events as beginning the end. They expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes. However, by the

- What tragedy you have faced has most made you who you are?
- What if we didn't build churches and temples as places to worship? How might the people as living stones support each other in faith and worship?

As Sunday's gospel passage begins, people admire the stones and adornments of the temple. Jesus, the cornerstone of a new community, stands in this scene before a magnificent, 500-year-old building no one could have imagined would be gone.

At the time Luke writes, Jesus' prophetic words have come true. This testifies to the truth of the four imperatives in Sunday's gospel that tell us how to survive such profound upheavals as the loss of a long-standing center of worship and life. The imperatives are—

1. Don't stray.
2. Don't panic.
3. Give witness.
4. Endure.

The gospel parts labelled *Jesus 1, 2, 3, and 4* each contain one of these imperatives.

First, when people say, "I am he (the messiah). I know when



Contemporary Jews pray at the Western Wall of the temple destroyed in A.D. 70. The wall is part of the temple's foundation.

the end will be," don't go after them. Keep faith in Jesus.

Second, when you hear of war and tumult, Jesus says, "Don't be terrified. These things will happen. They are not the end."

Third, and worse, expect persecution. Expect that what happened to Jesus himself can happen to followers. A time of persecution will be a time to bear witness. In that time, Jesus promises to put words in his followers' mouths.

Fourth, and worse than persecution, Jesus tells his

followers to expect parents, family, and friends to betray them and have them put to death. Here Luke has Jesus explaining how Christians in the 80s are to live as they face betrayal, even from other Jews and kin. Endure in faith is Luke's ethic for the time between Jesus' first and second comings.

● What are your personal imperatives?

● Which are like Jesus' four imperatives?

Many people speak in Jesus' name today, quoting passages like Sunday's gospel. They insist wars, earthquakes, rampant bacteria, rising sea levels, and melting glaciers all tell us the end is near and we should follow them. Books on these topics sell hundreds of thousands of copies.

Luke, the writer and proclaimer of Jesus' message for the time between Jesus' two comings, insists Christians can face terrifying events. Faith is not certainty. But it is trust that no other than Jesus, who passed



A scale model of the Jerusalem Temple in Jesus' time.

