

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.

Young people worry about the threats to Earth, our common home. We wonder and many scientists study how climate change is affecting us. What memories of the covid pandemic recur in your mind?

We in our gas and coal-powered civilizations keep generating the carbon dioxide that raises global temperature. We are sweating through new high temperature levels and drinking bottled water because we worry the water in our faucets is unsafe.

Hurricanes pound the coasts, establishing new records in rainfall. Near the oceans people may have to leave their homes because they can't reinsure what they rebuild. On Pacific islands, people may have to move as glaciers melt and sea waters rise.

Heat, rain, blizzards, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes—most people have experienced and survived such destructive forces. Now our human impact on the climate

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

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 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.

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 do you do to lessen climate change?

● How do you see individuals and families trying to help?



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



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

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 through death to life, offers words of eternal life. Faith in



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

Jesus is our deepest anchor and surest model for enduring the shifts and swells of social and personal upheaval.

- What most threatens the calm of your world?
- What support do you feel from others' faith at Eucharist?
- What would you like to be caught doing in a crisis?

FIRST READING

God's wrath burns and justice heals.

Malachi is a prophet of doom. No one can accuse Malachi of the shallow, pollyanna attitudes of false prophets. The *Dies Irae*, a special part of the funeral Mass before the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, sang of death using Malachi's words. It began, "Day of wrath, day of mourning, heed the prophet's warning." This is a very different view of death than the *Mass of Christian Burial*, which celebrates Jesus' promise of resurrection rather than an ominous threat of God's wrath.

The day of wrath Malachi describes is the reverse side of God's promises to Israel. To a people complacent and apathetic about the demands of justice, the prophets speak words of accusation and doom. They bring suit against Israel for infidelity to God and God's promises. They promise God's wrath will burn away their injustice rather than protect the people against their enemies. Their enemies will be the hand of God against them.

However, even a prophet who describes God's wrath as vigorously as Malachi does also promises God will respond to fidelity with healing. The prophet speaks to stir Israel to faith and real relationship with God rather than assuming God will save them because they belong by birth to God's people or dwell in the city of Jerusalem, which God protected in the past.

Malachi stirs Israel to fear and faith.

Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the Lord of hosts.

But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

Malachi 3.19-20

- How might you make today a nonjudgment day?
- How do you feel about the day of God's coming?
- What injustices are you or your parish complacent and apathetic about?

PRAY

LEADER: How long, Holy One, will children in our country go hungry?

ALL: How long? Not long.

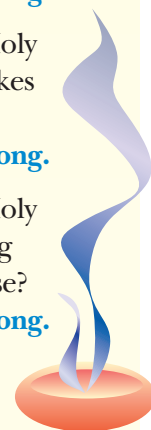
LEADER: How long, Holy One, will people tell jokes that put others down?

ALL: How long? Not long.

LEADER: How long, Holy One, will we do nothing rather than compromise?

ALL: How long? Not long.

Use this pattern to pray about concerns in the news.

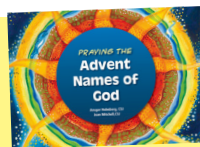


Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of *Sunday by Sunday*, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

DO SOMETHING



- Catholic Relief Services describes how climate change affects various countries. Visit *Laudato Si'* Our Common Home and Climate Change at: www.crs.org/climate-change.
- Catholic Climate Covenant offers special programs to celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. Catholicclimatechange.org.



ADVENT NAMES OF GOD

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