



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

**THE 23rd SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST**

NOVEMBER 13, 2022

A Homily by the Rev. Jo P. Popham

“Signs of hope, not the end of God’s time”

At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 – World War I – the war to end all wars – came to an end. We mark this day every year on the Sunday closest to November 11th by observing Veteran’s Day not just to recall the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for their nation for the cause of justice and freedom, but to honor all those who served and continue to serve in times of conflict and in times of peace – here in this country and abroad. The last World War I Veteran died a few years ago at the age of 110.¹ There are approximately 100,000 surviving veterans from World War II, with the second most coming from Florida with almost 15,000. California has the most World War II Veterans with just under 16,000 by the last count. World War II ended in 1945. The Korean War ended in 1953. The Cold War ended in 1991. Our involvement in the war in Afghanistan lasted 20 years and ended last year.

The Vietnam War was the war of my generation. It is hard to believe that 20 year conflict ended in the mid 70’s. The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., is 40 years old this year. All 58,281 names on the black granite wall were read Monday through Thursday this past week. All 58,281 names. If you have been to visit “The Wall” you will notice a remarkable difference there from the other memorials in D.C. It is shockingly quiet there, hauntingly silent. I recently learned that for 10 years the black granite was not cleaned by the park service, but now volunteers lovingly wash down the memorial. They gather on weekends at 6:30 in the morning, as the sun is breaking across the Capitol Dome, and quietly untangle the water hoses and wet down the names of the men and women lost in Vietnam. Then they scrub the monument wall down with soft brushes washing away a weeks’ worth of fingerprints and tears of those who came to remember and honor their friends and family members. Who are the people who come out before the tourists every weekend to gently, reverently clean the face of the granite wall that

commemorates those lost in Vietnam? Many of the regular volunteers are military veterans, but others come from church groups, Boy Scouts, college sorority sisters, and a few are those who travel to Washington, D.C., just for this solemn duty, to clean the surface of the memorial. We go and look up the name of friends in the volumes of the names recorded in the index books to find them on the The Wall. Jim's name could have been on that wall.²

Veteran's Day is not the same as Memorial Day that we celebrated last spring. No, today we call to mind all who have served and those who are on active duty now. But those in my generation cannot help but remember those who served who did not come home from Vietnam, those who died, and those who are still missing in action.

“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately” [Emphasis added].³ Looking back at the wars our nation has fought, at conflicts so horrendous, some in our day think society may be quickly heading toward the end times. But, friends, we see things very differently. Let us not forget to look at the context of Luke's writings on our Lord's words. Jesus had been hurrying to impart as much as he could to encourage the people – his closest followers and those others who listened to his teachings.⁴ And then one of those in the Temple asked about the end times. First Jesus spoke of the fall of their beautiful Temple.⁵ Then he warned about false prophets who were speaking of the end times, of wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues, of persecution and arrests, betrayals. Jesus told his own to take these as opportunities to testify to him and that they should endure these things because they were his.⁶

Jesus then went on to speak more on the destruction of the Temple,⁷ of distressing signs in the sun, the moon, the stars, in the roaring seas, and waves⁸ but they – and we – are not to lose heart, we are to persevere because his words will prevail in the end.⁹ More and more people came to listen to him teach in the Temple.¹⁰

Do these apocalyptic messages seem familiar to us? We know all too well of the wars and insurrections of our times. And the people of Haiti so close to our hearts have

suffered from repeated earthquakes. The famines in Africa are heartbreaking and unnecessary now because grain cannot be imported from the world's bread basket – the Ukraine. In the wake of some of the strongest storms ever recorded, people who are still cleaning up after Hurricane Ian find little solace in Jesus's teachings on the end times, not to mention Katrina and last year Ida in New Orleans and on the Gulf coast of Mississippi and Sandy in New York and New Jersey, and Laura and three other hurricanes the same year in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and Michael here in Florida, and to a lesser extent Sally here in Destin. And then there is the plague – COVID 19. It might seem to us and others still not completely recovered that the end times are very near. But we need to keep all these historical events in perspective. The first Christian generation may have taken from Jesus's teachings and the events they saw that they were living in the last times.¹¹ That was 2000 years ago. And we need to remember that the author of Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles wrote in the last third of the 1st century; most scholars say that Luke wrote both volumes about the years 80 to 90 in the year of the Lord.¹² This was after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 during a time of persecution of the new Christian community. Acts is the story of the first Christians and the church, and it is full of stories of arrests, of persecution, and of imprisonments all because of Jesus's name.¹³ So Luke and his readers could look back on the Temple's destruction– the days when “not one stone would be left upon another”¹⁴ – because it had already happened in the year 70. The Temple had already fallen. They could look back and see it as an historical event. They knew it had happened and that it was not the end.¹⁵ But without the Temple both Jews and Christians had to rethink their understanding of faith.¹⁶ And the church of today continues to do just that. Luke told of the destruction of the Temple and all the other catastrophic signs through Jesus foretelling them in light of the Old Testament prophecies, but indeed they had already happened. There had been terrible tragedies by the end of the 1st century: the persecution of Roman Christians by Nero in the year 64 where Christians were crucified and burned alive, the Jewish war against the Romans in 66 to 70 that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the

Temple, the slaughter and enslavement of the city's population, the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in the year 79 that darkened the skies and changed the climate of the Mediterranean for a full year. Many of the first Christians had seen these events take place, and Luke wrote looking back on them. In the same way Christians living at the time of World War II saw the rise of Hitler, the Holocaust, and the use of atomic weapons as signs that the second coming of Christ was near, but we can look back on them as terrible times in history, but not the end of history.¹⁷ One day in the future – please, Lord, soon – we will look back at the atrocities of the war in the Ukraine as a tragic historical event, just as those of us who have lived through recent strong hurricanes already do. We might have seen all these events as the end, but we choose to see them as opportunities for new ministries – for furthering God's kingdom – for caring for the people of God. We see that happening as we care for one another after natural disasters and feeding millions of refugees in neighboring countries to war torn Ukraine. The first Christians and we look back on the hard times of life as part of history, not signs of the end of God's time.

In today's reading Jesus was counseling his hearers – and that includes us today – not to be afraid but to have hope. He is calling us to faithful readiness because the advent of the Son of Man is nothing less than the coming of the Day of the Lord.¹⁸ Let us embrace Jesus's redemptive message to persevere, because we have the promise that if we endure we will gain your souls.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ Frank Woodruff Buckles (1901 – 2011) was the last known WW I veteran.

² But for his high draft number, Jim would have gone to Vietnam to fight along side friends.

³ Luke 21.9.

⁴ In today's reading in the Gospel according to Luke, we have come to the end – the end of Jesus's earthly ministry. He had been teaching in the Temple, and he was asked about the end times. Leading up to these last days among the people before his arrest, his trial, his death, and his resurrection, our Lord was trying to impart as much about God's kingdom as he could. It was as though he was hurrying to give his disciples and the people everything needed to continue his work after he was gone. He had entered into Jerusalem triumphantly to songs of praise and waving of palm branches, but when he saw the city he wept because the people could not see God's purpose for them, could not see that he had

come to bring them redemption. (Luke 19:41). He went into the Temple – his Father’s house – and saw not a house of prayer but a den of robbers (Luke 19:46). Jesus’s teachings were embraced by many people, but they frightened the Jewish authorities, so they looked for a way to kill him (Luke 19:47). The chief priests, the scribes, and Jewish leaders questioned his authority, because they had always been the ones to interpret God’s laws on behalf of Israel – it was they and their temple system that represented God’s presence in Israel (Joel B. Green, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, p. 1893). Jesus’s vision of God’s redemptive plan was very different from their understanding of God’s work among them – and through them (Luke 20:1-8). They tried to trick Jesus with questions about paying taxes (Luke 20:20-26). The Sadducees asked a trick question about resurrection – because in their orthodoxy – there was no afterlife, as we heard in last Sunday’s Gospel (Luke 20:27–38). Some of the scribes admitted that he answered their questions well, but others in the Temple continued to pursue him with bad intentions. In their hearing he warned the disciples about the wickedness of the scribes saying that they even took advantage of poor widows (Luke 20:45–47). Jesus taught about good stewardship using the story of the widow who gave all she had while the rich put money into the treasury but did not help the widow (Luke 21:1-4). All the while there were schemes being planned by the Jewish authorities who were threatened by Jesus.

⁵ Remember that this is the Second Temple that was destroyed in Jesus’s day. Solomon’s Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in the late 500’s BCE. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple 585 years later in the year 70 CE (AD) as a retaliation of the ongoing Jewish revolt. Ironically it was the same day that the first temple was destroyed. All that remained and stands until today is the western wall.

⁶ Luke 21:5–19.

⁷ Luke 21:20-24.

⁸ Luke 21:25.

⁹ Luke 21:35.

¹⁰ Luke 21:38.

¹¹ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, pp. 264-265.

¹² Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, pp. 1953 and 2057.

¹³ David L. Tiede, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, p. 2000.

¹⁴ Luke 21:6.

¹⁵ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, p. 265.

¹⁶ Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, p. 265.

¹⁷ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, p. 264.

¹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, p. 1895.