

Text - Luke 21:5-19

“Keep Calm and Carry On.” Words printed in white on a red poster background under the image of a Tudor crown. The words and posters were part of a campaign in the United Kingdom during the Second World War when air raids were imminent in 1939. The Blitz, as the UK came to call it, arrived on September 7, 1940 as bombs dropped from the air on London by German bombers.

The posters were part of a failed campaign. As one of a three part series, the first two sets of posters were very unpopular with the British public, so this third poster set of “Keep Calm and Carry On” was never really used to bolster public morale, even though over 2 million copies were printed. Mostly, they sat in storage.

It wasn't until the year 2000 when Stuart Manley, co-owner of Barter Books in Northumberland with his wife Mary, discovered one that the posters resurfaced. Stuart had been sorting through a box of used books when he found an original copy. He and Mary framed it and hung it up by their cash register. The rest is history. The popularity of the slogan exploded onto posters, coffee and tea mugs, and t-shirts. All of a sudden the words were everywhere - Keep Calm and Carry On - a message from the past, a message of calm in current times of crisis.

Parody t-shirts and posters also popped up. “Stay Alive and Avoid Zombies” came with the popularity of the tv series *The Walking Dead*. Or “Now Panic and Freak Out” the exact opposite of the original meaning, for all the worries of the world. Or “Keep Calm and Wash Your Hands” a public service announcement during this Covid-19 pandemic. Even the former mayor of Calgary, Naheed Nenshi, got his own t-shirt slogan while he was encouraging the citizens of Calgary in the aftermath of flooding in 2013 - “Keep Calm and Nenshi On.” Well, you get the gist.

This morning, Luke paints a picture of Jesus who is calm in the midst of crisis and worry as apocalyptic imagery takes us toward the end of Luke's accounting and into the advent of Matthew's gospel account.

Jesus, who has set his face toward Jerusalem, is now there with his disciples in the temple, teaching in the place which was the heart and seat of Jewish religious and economic life, the place of God's very presence in the midst of the people. As the disciples marvel at the beauty and ornamentation of the temple, Jesus declares that it will not remain, it will come down - the beautiful and magnificent additions which Herod the Great had constructed, all the stones, the gold, the solid walls and intricate porticoes - all of it destroyed.

We seem to read into the text that the disciples are surprised by Jesus' words and maybe they are, for we know from the writings of the ancient historian, Josephus, that the temple was large and seemingly very permanent. But perhaps the disciples are not surprised. This was the second temple, after all, that stood now; the first destroyed by the Babylonians some 500 years earlier, though considerably smaller than the temple they were currently standing in.

Perhaps, more than anything, more than being surprised, the disciples want to know when. What are the signs so they can prepare themselves, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign?" Behind the question is likely fear more than curiosity. Jesus reminds them in their worry, to be careful and to stay the course. He remains calm and essentially says to his disciples, as Diana Butler Bass suggests, "Even this beautiful temple won't ultimately survive. Human things, castles and fortresses and cathedrals of every sort may seem eternal. But no. Like us humans, like the seasons, they too will have an end."

As he has entered Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching about endings, that things will crumble, die even. Though calamity like wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famines and plagues will come, arrests, and even death, will come, Jesus remains calm and says to his friends, "Do not be terrified." It's

important to remember that the book of Acts follows Luke, and indeed, we are told some of these things do come. The discipleship community, the apostles and disciples, will be called upon to give evidence of their faith and their hope in those times.

In Luke, Jesus is saying to his friends, his disciples that their life is now with him, and he is calling them to the faith and the hope that was first revealed to them in his presence. Yes, he says, things will end. Yes, he says, things will begin again. But right now, in these times, you will be given words and wisdom, Luke's version of the Holy Spirit, to testify to the truth of the matter. They are not alone.

This is Luke's accounting of Jesus' calm presence with the disciples, even in the midst of their fear, reminding them of who they have been called to be: a new community formed in and by and through him, a new community called to give evidence of their hope, no matter what the current circumstances may be, to embody and enact the kingdom which Jesus unveils to the world through his life, his death, and his resurrection.

This new beloved community is to imitate Jesus and to make God's love for creation, all of creation, known. That is, to love neighbour and enemy. To welcome the stranger, the alien. To give to the poor and vulnerable, to the widow and the orphan. To forgive. To reconcile what has been estranged. To heal what has been wounded. "To not weary in doing what is right." To remember, as Diana Butler Bass writes, that "new life comes from every death, that resurrection is a practice and not a miracle. [that] in the midst of the world's decay, the kingdom is coming - not with a bang but with a whisper." Quietly, steadily, the kingdom of God comes through the evidence of the way Jesus' beloved community lives in faith and in hope. To read the signs we already know to be true, and in the midst of these things to tell the story of where our hope is rooted and to whom our hope is anchored.

Author and theologian, Frederick Buechner, wrote about his definitions of important words within Christianity in his book *Wishful*

*Thinking: A Theological ABC.* He wrote the book in 1973 and his definitions still stand the test of time. He wrote them during a time of tumult and change. The Vietnam war was coming to an end, civil rights and equal rights, women's rights and gay rights, these movements were in full swing, along with the Watergate scandal and the energy crisis. Anxious times then too. For Buechner's definition of the word "hope" the reader is redirected instead to the word "cross."

Buechner wrote of cross and hope, "What emerged from [Jesus'] death was a kind of way, of truth, of life, without which the last two thousand years of human history would be even more unthinkable than they are. A six-pointed star, a crescent moon, a lotus - the symbols of other religions suggest beauty and light. The symbol of Christianity is an instrument of death. It suggests, at the very least, hope."

Amen.