

Sermon preached by Bob Undercuffler, pastor

“TESTIFY”

Luke 21:5-19

“I will lift-up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” That’s from Psalm 121.

People chanted that as they moved on pilgrimage up to Jerusalem. Not only on pilgrimage – but also when going to Jerusalem on business or to visit kinfolk. Or whenever.

People were thrilled by the sight of the Temple. But deeper and more profound, they were ecstatic to know that the God they worshiped was so grand in power and mercy.

Up there – up in those hills was Jerusalem ... the capital city ... and the **TEMPLE**. The glorious temple.

As they began their journey they couldn’t see the Temple.

If they were travelling from Jericho, Jerusalem was 16 miles off in the distance ...

but no matter how far away, they were drawn to the Temple in their mind’s eye ...

for they remembered ...and they knew the God they worshipped in the Temple was the Lord God of heaven and earth.

It was a glorious Temple – for they worshipped a glorious God ...
A MIGHTY GOD. SO AN AWESOME TEMPLE.

The temple area approx. 350 ft. x 350 ft. built of white marble covered with heavy plates of ornamented gold on the front and sides.

The Temple soared 150 feet into the air ...That soaring tower – again fine white marble covered with heavily ornamented gold

Inside, the heart of the temple was The Holy of Holies and the Holy Place.

PILGRIMS AND VISITORS ALIKE, AS THEY APPROACHED, REPORTED THAT THE TEMPLE BLAZED IN THE MIDDAY SUN.

INDEED, "I WILL LIFT UP MY EYES TO THE HILLS. FROM WHERE DOES MY HELP COME?"

The Temple was solid reminder ... "MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH."

THAT GLORIOUS TEMPLE – was a constant reminder OF GOD'S MAJESTY AND POWER AND SPLENDOR.

So Jesus and his close friends have completed their trek up through the hills ... drawn by God ... and now they gathered in that awesome Temple. More precisely, in one of the grand plazas or porches that surrounded the Temple.

You couldn't help but admire the Temple. Big ... and solid boulders ... many as large as 4' x 8' by 3' tall. The gold plates were similarly huge ... Gold that was as treasured as their God.

And all of this was dedicated to God! When you were in the temple – in proximity to the temple ... it took your breath away. And you marveled. How great God is. How great thou art.

And Jesus speaks to his followers ... "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down!"

What was that? Did I miss something in translation? What did Jesus say? Oh no -- preposterous ... "When will this happen? "What will be the sign of when this will take place?"

Jesus explains ... "Imposters will come and try to trick you who are being faithful.

And war and conflict will rage on.

And natural disasters will be commonplace... such as earthquakes and famines and plagues."

But these will not all happen at once, Jesus assures. And they are all off in the future. Hummm ... I wonder as far off as 2013/2014? That makes me a little nervous.

But then Jesus says a strange thing – certainly unexpected ...

“THIS WILL GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY.”
(opportunity to affirm, to bear witness)

And don't worry so much about planning what you're going to say –
JUST TESTIFY.

No canned testimony ...no rehearsing ...SIMPLY TESTIFY.

Don't make-up a story, don't call-in the Jerusalem
Times and enlist a photographer ... and the website will
take care of itself ... SIMPLY TESTIFY.

Testify? Testify to what?

Testify to how God lead you out of bondage in Egypt and
brought you to this land.

Testify to what God has done for you.

Testify to the difference God has made in your life.

Testify how once you were blind but now you see.

Testify about how God's love has lifted you.

Testify to how the people of God ...

to how the church has walked with
you through difficult times...leading
you from darkness into light.

You see, people of Jesus' day testified about the temple ...

the grandeur of the temple ...

the magnificence of the architecture ...

How it gleamed in the mid day sun –

they told about how those massive marble
boulders were brought to the Temple mount
and then edged-up-hoisted by a series of
pulleys into place ...

historians record that 10,000 laborers
made that happen. To all that
accomplishment they testified.

And so in our day we marvel at cathedrals and churches, mosques
and temples –

the marvelous stained glass, and high vaulted ceilings,
and intricate wood carvings, and breath-taking
paintings.

And with some holy places the work continues. Then we return home and testify to friends and family of their magnificence and beauty.

Back in late summer, one afternoon there was a knock on the door outside our church office. I answered the door and the gentleman with his wife said that they had been told of Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church ... when you're in that area stop and see the sanctuary. It's a gem, they were told. The stained glass windows ... they said. And the tin ceiling.

MAY WE SEE IT?

"Certainly" ... and I ushered them to the sanctuary ... they entered ... in silence ... and observed.

They were impressed.

His wife had never seen a tin ceiling before ... so he explained the process of forming the tin and adding the color.

And the windows ... They analyzed our glorious stained-glass windows – No, they definitely aren't Tiffany windows ... or Willet – and they asked me ... "who fashioned those windows? I found myself entering into that conversation.

But lurking in the back of my mind ... deep within the inner reaches of my heart were Jesus' words to admiring followers ...

"As for these things which you see, the days will come when not one stone (nor brick) will be left upon another – all will be thrown down." These windows and tin ceiling crushed."

No, I didn't say that ... probably they would have simply written me off as one of those apocalyptic preachers they have watched on television – grimaced and then surfed to another channel. And so they would be left wondering what is such a preacher doing here in this lovely, refined place?

Honey, she said (to her husband) look how these colors flow ... the colors in the windows are captured by the walls and the woodwork and carpet.

And I had heard enough. I said something like this ... When I look at that stained glass window (*Jesus standing at the door and knocking*)... I recall Harold Ferguson making his last trip in his old truck, drawn to the church... He needed to get into the sanctuary ... and we sat here and looked at that window.

And Harold testified to the Jesus who knocked at the door of his life ...

and Harold would crack the door a bit ... "I knew the stories ... the principles ... he said, but finally I opened the door wide and found some peace and hope."

"Bob, I know I'm not perfect, but Jesus found me, and I am so glad.

"I found my wife here. "I found my life here."

Testify –

It is, after all, only brick and mortar, wood and glass. And all that can vanish ... all that will vanish.

What will last into eternity are the relationships, the friendships, the commitments and holy promises ... the fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ ... who sits with us at table ... and feeds us. Who calls us as his own and washes us clean ... time and time again, for God's mercy is so deep and wide.

You know the impact this church ... this fellowship ... this Jesus has on your life. Here you have been nurtured, stretched, at times pried-open. Here you have been touched by love. Here you have been picked-up and pointed back to a better way. A lively future is at our doorstep. So TESTIFY. TESTIFY.

And let the people say, AMEN.