



“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” Jesus says.
The people listening to him are amazed.

They are in the temple in Jerusalem –
the temple which has stood for five centuries
and been under renovation by Herod the Great for decades.
The temple which is the center of Jewish religious practice.
To speak of the destruction of the temple is shocking.

To understand this passage, it is helpful to know a bit about the history of the temple.
And, about who Jesus is, and how John describes Jesus.

We can start where we left off last Sunday,
with the prophet Samuel anointing David to be king.
During his long and troubled reign, David wants to build a temple –
a house for the Lord.
But God tells him No, you will not build a house for me.
Instead, I will make a house for you.
I will make of your descendants a dynasty of kings who will reign over
and care for my people.
This promise is a foundation of the hope of a messiah
from the lineage of David



It is David’s son, King Solomon, who builds a temple for God.
Our reading begins with Solomon stating his intention to a neighboring
king, Hiram of Tyre.

From Hiram, Solomon secures vast quantities of fine cedar wood
to build the temple.
He has huge blocks of the choicest stone quarried,
and commands that the building's foundation be laid with hewn stone.
As 1 Kings describes, “The floor of the Temple was of fir overlaid with gold. The
doorposts, of olivewood, supported folding doors of fir. The doors of the Holy of Holies
were of olivewood. On both sets of doors were carved cherubim, palm trees, and flowers,
all being overlaid with gold”
No expense is spared in the building of Solomon’s temple.

The second part of our reading tells the story of the ark of the covenant moving into the “inner sanctuary, the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim.”

In the slides, you can see that the Temple is constructed with outer and inner courts, which define limitations in access to the Holy of Holies, which sits at the center as the dwelling place of God. Outside the Holy of holies is the pot for incense, altar for sacrifice – where only priests go.

When the ark is in its place, the “glory of the Lord fills the house of the Lord.” God has come to dwell in the temple, and his presence is like a cloud – like the pillar of cloud that went before the Israelites in the wilderness. Remember that in the ark are the tablets of the covenant – the foundation of the relationship between God and Israel. They are a physical representation of God’s promise – “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”

Of course, God’s presence isn’t confined to the temple – all the people know that God is present throughout God’s creation. But the temple is a place set apart, a place of intensified presence of God. It is here that the community gathers for the rites and prayers which are central to their faith.



This first temple was completed in about 957 BCE, and was in use until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587, when they conquered the Israelites and took the leaders into exile.

After the return from exile, in 516 BCE, the temple was rebuilt.

This Second Temple was the temple Jesus visited.

In 70 CE, the second temple was destroyed by Rome, and was never rebuilt.

Today, it is a Muslim site – the 12th century Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

The original temple walls are a Jewish holy site – the Western Wall, or Wailing Wall.

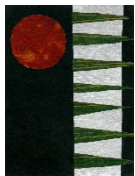
Which is just one glimpse of the complexities of the Holy Land.



Worship at the temple was a key part of the religious life of the Jews, including Jesus, and also the first hearers of the gospel.

All of the gospels were written between 70 and 90CE –
so it is likely that all the gospel writers were living through
the devastation of the second temple's destruction.
What now, the people wondered, now that the temple has been destroyed?
The gospels offer a response –
Jesus is the new temple.
Jesus is the new hope.
Jesus is the location of the presence and power and mystery of God.
One of John's primary images of Jesus is as the Lamb of God –
the temple sacrifice of atonement
whose death and resurrection puts us into right relationship with God.

So, I'm a bible nerd – which is a good thing for a pastor to be.
I love the history of scripture.
I'm excited by the ways the bible stories echo each other, back and forth,
Old Testament and New Testament.
But what does all this say to us, now, in the middle of the anxiety and grief,
the violence and destruction, we see all around us?



First, it reminds us of God's constant presence with God's people.
From the pillar of cloud in the wilderness
to the cloud and storm on the mountaintop,
to the cloud filling the temple;
from the renewal of faith and practice in the Second Temple after exile,
to the promise of Jesus – God with us.
God's desire has always been to be with us, to be known by us,
to love and be loved by us.

When Jesus knew he was going to be arrested and killed,
he made a new promise to his disciples –
a promise we claim and participate in whenever we gather for Holy Communion.
Take this bread and eat – take and drink this cup
And whenever you gather to share this meal, I am there with you.

What's more, this story of building and rebuilding

- The temple built, and destroyed, built, and destroyed
- the house of David fallen into exile and restored in Jesus,
- the body of Jesus killed and then resurrected to new life

All this reminds us that we have a God
who works from destruction and despair
to bring new life and new hope

It is Reformation Sunday – a day that reminds us that things always change.
That sometimes an ending, a separation, is the most faithful thing –
because it makes way for something new.

Martin Luther didn't set out to start a new church,
but to reform the church that he loved enough
to be grieved by its errors and abuses and work for something new.

Luther's excommunication was a loss, an ending of something he cared about –
while also being the thing that freed him for the work he was to do.

He translated the bible and wrote the small catechism
to put the study of faith and growth in relationship with God
into the hands of the people.

Martin Luther gives us an example of standing firm in faith
even in the face of loss and grief, outrage and fear.

It's hard, when we are in the midst of fear and pain,
when despair hovers near,
to see the way through.

That is why we tell the bible stories of destruction and renewal,
death and new life.

And we tell our own stories of finding hope in the midst of struggle.

We know that God is everywhere in God's creation.

But we come here because in our church, in our community of faith,
we find an intensified sense of God's presence.

Gathering in this space and sharing this meal
is one way we practice our faith together,
sharing with one another the tangible promise of God's love and presence.

So we come here, week after week, to hear the Bible stories,
which are our stories.

We sing and pray.

And then we gather at the table,
where we hear that Jesus comes to us once again,
this day, meeting us here in the midst of our sorrow and fear.

Jesus is here, to give us courage and hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.