

**November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022**  
**A Sunday Service for Summerland United Church**  
**Anne Ellis**

**THEME CONVERSATION** I'm three generations removed for world war 2. My grandfather flew Sunderland's during the war. These were huge planes and they were bombers. My grandfather never talked about that part of his war. But knowing what I know about Sunderland's and their missions in the Atlantic theatre against U-Boats I have a pretty good notion of the suffering my grandfather caused.

What my grandfather did talk about though, was what he did post war. Stationed in England he flew his plane in the Berlin Airlift. From June 1948 to September 1949 planes flew over 250,000 missions, dropping necessities such as fuel and food. Taking 3,475 tons of supplies daily to a city, a country that only a couple years before was an enemy. By the spring of 1949 daily deliveries totaled 12,941 tons of supplies, dropped in West Berlin, aircraft dubbed "raisin bombers" because of the candy and treats dropped for Children.

Planes that brought destruction then brought peace. Today's scripture passage reflects this and this story from my grandfather's war was forefront in my mind as I reflected on the passage, so I share it with you along with an invitation to try to think of your own similar stories you might have.

**SCRIPTURE READING    Luke 21:5-19**

**REFLECTION**

This chapter is Luke, follows almost directly after the passage we looked at last week. And to dig into this week we need a little recap. In chapter 20 Jesus was challenged on the practicalities of the resurrection by the Sadducees. Jesus shocked his audience by dismissing the premise of the question and redefined what the new world will look like. A world where concepts of status, hierarchy and inequity would be abolished for all people and all creation.

This week's passage is a heavy one. It is not an easy one to listen too nor an easy one to find hope in.

If we're going to find any, we need a little more context. After Jesus redefines the new creation at the end of Chapter 20, the Sadducees and disciples are stunned into silence, not daring to ask any more questions. The chapter wraps up with Jesus providing a warning to watch out for 'religious scholars, who swallow up the property of women who are widowed and make a show of lengthy prayers.'

Chapter 21 begins with the parable of the Widow's Mite. Jesus sees rich people making lavish offerings and then watches a widow offer two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. "Truly I tell you," he says, "this poor widow has given more than those with wealth. For they give from abundance and she from poverty and all that she has.'

Then we get to today's passage, where the disciples are distracted by the opulence and richness of the temple. Jesus tells them, somewhat sarcastically to enjoy it while they can, because soon it will all be destroyed.

These are three reminders that material wealth is meaningless and impermanent, as well as pointing out the hypocrisy of those with power, that too will soon come to an end.

The disciples are nervous and ask – when is this going to happen? What are the signs to watch for?

At which time Jesus then lists a series of horrific events, which are terrifying. But we need to stop for a moment and remember that Luke is writing decades after Jesus' death. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, a famine in Jerusalem in 47CE, an earthquake in Philippi in 50CE. Jesus's prophecy is true, because Luke is writing after all these events have happened and attributing them to a voice the past.

the people hearing Luke's Gospel in Luke's time have lived through these hardships. The persecutions in Jesus's name is already happening all over the Roman Empire. Parents, siblings, relatives, and friends have already turned in newly converted Christians. Many have already stood trial, stood before kings and governments for the sake of Jesus name. and they have been killed, martyred for their beliefs. For them, this isn't the future it's the present.

And according to Jesus's next words – whatever happens, not a single hair on your heads will be harmed. By enduring these things you will find not loss but gain – not death but authentic life. A measure of hope for people seeking an end to their suffering.

But we know human suffering doesn't end. We know from that day to this, 2000 plus years have gone by, and there has not been a single day on this planet some country was not at war with another. Famines, earthquakes and epidemics happen with regularity all over the planet.

So where do we find any hope or peace in this passage? Especially this weekend as we say, Lest We Forget, and remember and honour those lost in 2 wars that enveloped the entire world?

The question we're really asking here is – why does suffering happen? Why does God, an almighty, all powerful, all knowing, all loving, caring compassionate God let suffering happen?

This is not an easy question to answer and it is quite literally a question as old as time.

Now I will not claim that my answer to this question will be enough of an answer for everyone, but it works for me, some days. Other day's it doesn't.

The book of Job in the Hebrew Scriptures is one of the oldest written texts we have that addresses this subject. The exact time of Job's writing is unclear, its been dated from 700 - 300 BCE. Many of us are familiar with the story of Job. Job experiences immeasurable suffering, losing all of his land, wealth and family. Job was a blameless and upright man, who loved God and was faithful to his religion. Yet, all these horrific things happen and Job suffers. His friends come and sit with him in his grief but then try to convince Job to repent. For these bad things to have happened he must have done something wrong.

This is some rough theology here- bad things happen to you because you've done bad things. But Job refuses to believe that. He insists he's not sinned, he's not misbehaved, he's done everything right and he is furious with God for letting all of these things happen to him.

Eventually God speaks directly to Job and says, and I'm paraphrasing here, "Look I get it, you've had hardship and you're furious. You have a righteous anger and that's ok. Take a moment and look

around you at creation and all that I've made. The water that is both dew drops and torrents cutting a channel through rock and stone. The light that is both a gentle morning sunrise lighting the places of darkness and is a thunderbolt on desolate land." He asks Job, "Can you hunt the prey for the lion or satisfy the appetite of the young lions crouching in their dens? Who provides the raven its prey, when its young cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?"

We live in temporal and transient world. Creation is vast, tumultuous and its alive. We exist on a living breathing planet and being apart of creation is to engage in its liveliness which brings immense joy and immense sadness. There is suffering and death in the sustaining of life within creation.

Could suffering be lessened and alleviated? Yes, of course. But humanity, especially those with power, had a tendency to make choices out of fear and out of a desire to keep their power, regardless of the harm it brings to others and creation.

So they make decisions that perpetuate cycles of harm generation after generation.

But Job and Jesus break this cycle. Job refused to repent and say he's done wrong – when he's lived a good and noble life. He is honest with God in his anger and rage and grief and God responds with immense empathy– I know, I understand, I'm sorry, I see with you and I love you. I am with you and I always will be.

Jesus says, "these epidemics and earthquakes, the oppression and trials all these things, and more, you will suffer. I can not make them stop.

"But what I can do is help you transform your suffering into testimony. I will give you the opportunity to tell your story and allow it to open your heart to the needs of others. You will have opportunity to provide empathy for others who suffer too.

"You can help alleviate suffering in this world using my name and the strength you have gained from it. I will give you the audacity to muster courage and make choices from love, not fear – and then you will live an authentic life.

This passage beings with the disciples distracted by the richness and opulence of the temple and they miss seeing the truth in the world around them. This richness is meaningless while people suffer.

What things distract us from paying attention to the world around us? For me its social media, clickbait articles, the ingrained belief that buying something pretty will always make me feel better.

Jesus is telling us to wake up and find the boldness to speak into the face of suffering, he'll provide the words and the wisdom to live an authentic life. Perhaps the words are as simple as providing empathy: I know, I understand, I'm sorry, I see you and I love you. I am with you, and I always will be.

May it be so, amen