

**LENT #5: The Stones Would Shout**  
***The Stones that Fall***

March 25, 2009

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I find that Jesus' words in the gospel lesson are difficult to interpret. I mean, I get the literal meaning of them, but with Jesus it's usually safe to expect a deeper meaning than simple fact-giving statements.

In our reading from Luke, Jesus and his disciples have finally made it to Jerusalem, and have paid a visit to the temple. Jesus is days away from his crucifixion, and he spends his time in the temple – which is a curious thing.

When you think about the history of God and Israel, throughout all the time from creation unto King David, there was no temple at all. It wasn't until the reign of king Solomon that the temple was built. Before then, there was the tabernacle – which was in essence a very nice tent – that was thought of as the dwelling place of God.

But what about the tabernacle? It didn't come around until after the Israelites had been brought out of Egypt by Moses. So what did God's people do before there was a tabernacle? Did they just not worship Him? Of course they worshipped Him. They just did it wherever they were.

So what's the point of the temple? It was meant to be a dedicated place for worship. As God's people grew into a sizable nation, God gave to them some structure to how worship ought to be done. And he set aside a group of men to facilitate worship – those were the priests. But the priests were no more necessary than the temple or the tabernacle. What was essential – what was necessary – was the Israel give their all to God.

Fast forward to Jesus's day. The Israelites were back in Jerusalem, albeit under the Roman Empire, and they were worshipping in the temple, just like their forefathers had. The disciples are drinking in the sights, talking to each other about how over-the-top amazing looking the temple is.

Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't seem too impressed. His words are heavy with certainty and sadness, "A time is coming when all this stuff you're looking at will be torn down. Not one stone will be left on another."

What's the point? What's wrong with the temple? I think its not that the temple was a bad thing. I think it was a good thing being used badly. Think back to every conversation Jesus had with one of the temple-type people. They were constantly grilling him about the law. They were wrapped up in self-righteousness. I think what had happened was their religion had become their god.

And that is what the temple had come to stand for: Religiosity. Legalism. Doing God-things, rather than being God's children. No wonder Jesus forecasted its destruction. Elsewhere Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, "**A time is coming when you will [not] worship the Father... in Jerusalem... The true worshippers will worship in Spirit and Truth.**" If true worship of God was going to come about, the idol of what religion had become must first be torn down.

We also read about the Fall of Jericho today, which is in many ways a very similar story. The inhabitants of Jericho were hostile to God. They did not worship him, and their fortress-city stood between Israel and their promised land.

Jericho was an insurmountable obstacle. Its walls were thick and high. It had a supply of water close at hand and granaries large enough to sustain the city through long sieges. And it sat in between God's people and God's promise.

Well, you all know how the story goes, and you know how god tore down those impenetrable walls in mere moments. As the inhabitants of Jericho and the Israelites looked at those stones that used to be a wall scattered about and piled up, they heard the stones solemn and beautiful testimony, "There is nothing that can come between God and His people." And when

we reflect upon the ruins that were once the temple in Jerusalem, those stones join the refrain, “There is nothing that can come between God and His people.”

That’s the awe-inspiring and frightening and wonderful thing about God being God. He loves you too much to let anything separate you from Him. Sometimes we rejoice as he tears down barriers from the outside – like when he leveled Jericho. Sometimes we cringe when the walls are too personal – like the destruction of the temple. And when the walls come down we may feel liberated, or vulnerable and exposed.

But when the walls are down, we finally face reality. We are exposed to honesty and truth, and ultimately God’s Love. That’s what makes the cross so fearful and so wonderful. It is there that Jesus tears down our walls. It is there that we are confronted with holiness. It is there that we see, know, believe and are transformed by God’s Love.