

"Beware! Do Not be Led Astray!"

Luke 21:5-19

18 November 2007

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When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, "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." They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them. "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Prayer.

As we draw to an end
This liturgical year
we begin to experience
Far away and nearly invisible
The feint wisps of Advent
Beginning to make its appearance
On the horizon of faith
Consider the dualism
Of closure and opening
Life and after-life

The conclusion of earthly kingdoms
And the emergence of the
Kingdom of God.

Here we stand
Teetering on the cusp
With one foot planted squarely
In the current world
And one foot
Ready to be planted
In the world yet to come.

In this state of in-between-ness
We are vulnerable.

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Our anticipation places us at risk.
Our eagerness opens us to
Every wolf dressed in sheep' clothing.
Not all wolves know they are wolves.
Likewise each of us can become wolf
And not even know it.
Think of all the promises made
To keep us locked into the present
age:
Church revitalization
Leadership development
Church growth
Small groups
Capital fund raising.
To which Jesus proclaims,
"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."¹

All of which is not to say
That some of our labors in this age
Are not without merit.
We need to hold fast to our
commitments.
We need to honor our word.
We need to recognize earthly laws.
Be we do need to be wary.
We need to discern
We must remain vigilant.
Beware, Jesus warns us,
that you are not led astray;
for many will come in my name and
say,
'I am he!' and,
'The time is near!'
Do not go after them.²

Wolves will talk a good talk

¹ Luke 21:6

² Luke 21:8

About preparing for tomorrow.
But do not be fooled.
They intend to have you for lunch.
They want your money
(this world)
They want your support
(this world)
They want your heart;
In this world,
They will tear it right out of your chest
If you let them.

Who then, are we to heed?

Watch for the prophet
The one who comes to prepare the
way
for Messiah
And the world the Messiah
Will usher in.
Prophets don't want your money
They don't want to take
They want to give.
They want your attention
They want you to be aware of
what is going on around us.
"Pay attention to the wars and
insurrections.
Be aware of the earthquakes, famine,
and plagues.
Know that when you are arrested,
persecuted, and killed
It is only an earthy death,
For not a hair of your head will perish
In the eternal Kingdom of God.

Beware, be alert, and be strong.

The happenings of this world
Are not coincidental.
We should not treat them
With blind or indifferent ignorance.
We are already living God's plan.

We only see our tiny little piece.
Hindsight only affords us an educated
guess
Regarding divine strategy.
But from hindsight we should
Draw from the well of assurance
And know that we remain steadfast
In the hand of God.

I can not explain why those
Who love you, will turn on you.
But I do know that
God is in control.
I can not explain why some
Suffer terribly,
Disease, disaster, famine, and death,
But I do know that
God's plan is being deployed.
I can not explain
Why people hate
All because of the name of Jesus.
Yet, we know,
That even this
Is a facet of God's greater design.

Beware, be alert, and be strong.

In the Fifth Century,
John the Solitary
Counsels Hesychius to
"choose vigilance,
even in preference to fasting,
for vigilance makes
the understanding luminous,
it keeps the intellect awake,
it makes the body still,
it is more beneficial than
all other labours."³

³ John the Solitary, "Letter to Hesychius," in *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, Cistercian Publications, 1987, Pp. 23.

We know that a prolonged state of
Hyper vigilance is counterproductive.
Two thousand years of watching and
waiting
With every expectation that the next
moment
May be the last
May lead one to be tempted to
Downplay the importance
Or decrease the attention
One places on the imminence
In Jesus' voice we he tells us
Keep alert
Like the wise servants prepared
for the arrival of the householder.⁴

The editor of *Weavings*,
John S. Mogabgab,
writes in the latest edition:
"Vigilance is poised attentiveness
to the spiritual environment,
sensitive awareness of the presence
and purpose of God
in our midst,
uninhibited responsiveness to
the flow of Love's energy
at work in the world, (and)
constant resistance to temptations
that deform that love.
For Philotheos of Sinai,
Such alertness
'cleanses the conscience
and makes it lucid.'"⁵

Beware, be alert, and be strong.

Mindfulness
I believe

⁴ Luke 12:35-40

⁵ Mogabgab, J., *Weavings A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, XXII(6), November / December 2007, p.2-3.

Is the posture of all disciples of Jesus.
Mindfulness is both
Being alert and being aware
That the old world was,
And is now is.
The earth and its mortal nature was,
And is already gone.
The Kingdom of God both is,
And has already come.
For those who endure
Their souls have already been gained.
For those who remain strong
Salvation has already come.

Mindfulness
Knows that strength
Does not come from within
... the mustard seed amount of faith
has already been planted within you ...
rather strength is a gift
from God
for all those who would claim it
own it
and make it their own.

Mindfulness
Knows that strength
Does not come from knowing;
But from questioning.
Faith is never factual or certain
Otherwise, it wouldn't be faith.
Faith is being mindful enough
And courageous enough to
Be uninhibited and untiring
In the mortal quest
for divine answers.

Mindfulness
(Finally)
Is knowing that
At this place in the journey
It is impossible to traverse
The un-climbable rock

Of our existence,
To endure the trials and temptations
Of this mortal life,
And to do it Alone.

Endurance comes from community.
This Body of Christ
Is more than his flesh and blood.
This Body of Christ
Is comprised of every living disciple
And of every resurrected Saint.
The Body of Christ
... the whole Body of Christ ...
is necessary to carry us
when we can no longer carry
ourselves;
to support the journey of others
when they can no longer make it on
their own,
in order to bring
each and every one of us
to that circle around the heavenly
throne
when every soul is gained
and all former things will have
been passed away.⁶

Beware, be alert, and be strong.

Beware, my beloved,
That you are not led astray.
Be alert, dear members and friends of
Zion;
Mindful of the signs,
Believing that this is according to
God's greater plan.
And,
Be strong, disciples of Jesus.
Band together and you will endure,
And when these days of dualism
Come to an end,

⁶ Revelation 21:4

With only the heavenly realm before
us,
You will gain your souls.
Of this,
We can be assured.
Amen.