

“**What big eyes you have!**” That’s what the girl said to the wolf who was pretending to be her ill grandmother. Remember the wolf’s reply? “The better to see you with, my dear.”

This *Little Red Riding Hood* fable is at least 1,000 years old. There is an 11th century Belgian poem which tells of a girl who wandered off in a red baptismal tunic and met a wolf. But baptismal attire is white, not red. So, the original meaning of the tale was a warning that wandering from our baptismal vows can bring calamities that will kill us, or at least stain us in life-draining ways.



Katie Patterson, 2017, Deviant Art

Of course, Little Red Riding Hood—or Red, as Disney calls her today—has been adapted through the years all around the world. Many people have used this story for many purposes, including your preacher today.

Red must have known something wasn’t quite right. Her beloved grandmother wasn’t what she seemed. Maybe Red even knew, to her dawning horror, that SOMETHING NOT GRANDMA was in her grandmother’s bed. She must have known on some level that her grandmother appeared to be there but was gone.

“As [Jesus] was coming out of the Temple,” our gospel lesson says, “one of his disciples said to him, ‘Teacher, look! Such stones and such buildings!’” Maybe this disciple knew, to his dawning horror, that THE TEMPLE WASN’T REALLY THE TEMPLE ANY MORE. Jesus’ reply confirmed his fear by predicting destruction of the Temple.

Destruction of the Temple? This was unthinkable, apocalyptic, even. Jesus’ prediction was even thrown back at him later in a twisted way as one of the charges against him at his crucifixion trials. Jesus had THREATENED the Temple, according to the charge, making him unfaithful.

Jesus’ prediction about the destruction of this Temple was true; the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 of the Common Era, some 30 or so years after Jesus’ resurrection. But WE KNOW, given the benefit of hindsight, that the Temple was doomed as soon as Jesus made his prediction because (as our lesson says), “[Jesus] was coming out of the Temple.”

Much of Jesus’ ministry had been spent in the Temple. He was left behind there. He learned there. He taught there. He worshiped there. He healed there. He amazed people there. He even got angry there and cleaned house. But now, Jesus was leaving the Temple **for the last time**. He had already warned his

disciples about the fate of Jerusalem when he cursed the fig tree because it hadn't produced fruit in a long time.

I ask you, if Jesus was leaving the Temple for the last time, what chance did the Temple have to survive, to continue on?

We think of the unnamed disciple's comment as gratuitous wonder, awe even. And the Temple WAS awe-inspiring—an architectural wonder. But can we really dismiss this disciple as a naïve rube? Surely, he would have seen the Temple before. Why exclaim this way, on this day? (What big eyes you have, grandma!)

What if this disciple were neither ignorant nor hopelessly naïve? What if this disciple, like everyone else living in Roman-occupied Palestine in Jesus' day, feared destruction of the Temple was at hand?

There were a LOT of people who predicted the Temple's demise in Jesus' last days. Even the historian Josephus, who lived from 37 to 100 CE, said he had nightly dreams in which God warned of the calamity ahead. This fact is courtesy of many biblical commentators who also note that one of the metaphors Jesus used (“stone upon stone”) in his prediction links to a prophecy in which the Old Testament prophet Haggai urged the people to rebuild the original Temple (at Bethel, per Haggai 2:15 “stone upon stone”).

Rebuilding the Temple would not result in the very same Temple. Rather, there would be a new Temple in which to gather and approach and live in unity with God. In other words, Red needs to kick the wolf out of the bed and restore grandma, but not to her previously ill state, but to life and health. This is easier said than done because the Temple we have is the Temple we know.

In our own day, there are predictions of the death of OUR Temple, the Church. And there are others who call such predictions “unfaithful.” In the rest of our gospel lesson today, Jesus warned his disciples to not get caught up in the “when” of coming calamities, and to not be distracted by doomsayers. Because things we build come and go, no matter how wonderful and awe-inspiring. But God, God's Word, and God's Spirit are eternal.

Today's epistle lesson reminds us, quoting the prophet Jeremiah, that God put the Temple in our very being by writing God's laws in our hearts and minds. WE ARE THE TEMPLE, not the building in which we worship. Because we carry the very essence of God within us, God's Temple is infinitely portable.

Calamities come. Calamity upon calamity, like stone upon useless stone without Christ Jesus in the building. Jesus called calamities “necessary” and “birth pangs” for a new reality. Birth pangs are hard to bear but are necessary for a new reality to come into existence.

Life without grandma must have been unthinkable to Little Red Riding Hood, just as life without the Temple would have been unthinkable to those living in Jesus’ day. But we at Church of the Resurrection are demonstrating, in the words of our gospel hymn, “All [our] hope on God is founded.”

Pride of man and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust;
What with care and toil he buildeth,
Tower and temple, fall to dust
But God’s power,
Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.

So, today’s question is this: How will we, collectively, be the temple of Christ Jesus in our world?

