



Sunday November 16, 2025

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Sometime towards the end of October when I was driving in Merrick, I noticed that the lamppost had already had been trimmed with snowflakes. Have you seen that? Yep. Back in October, I'm talking here about here. And the stores were rolling out glossy ads, were families and matching pajamas around perfect trees, co-workers clinking holiday cups. And here's my favorite, air fresheners promising the aroma, a grandma's kitchen. But behind this sparkle, many of us are feeling something else. Already Black Friday ads have been priming the pump all month, trying to get us ready for November 28th. In the midst of the vamping up to the high holy days of commerce, millions of Americans find themselves facing great struggles. Inflation has tightened our wallets; food pantries are fuller. People are anxious about paychecks and planning for a winter of smaller choices. In other words, we're facing lean times. Scriptures know such seasons well. In Luke, we see the disciples admiring the temple, its stone, its glory, its magnificence. Standing in this shadow of this beautifully reconstructed temple, this 1st century masterpiece, the disciples, they're full of pride. Didn't this temple confirm their place in the world? Didn't it confirm that they will soon throw off the shackles of foreign oppression? And the Messiah will come to lead him to independence, power, and put Israel finally back on the map. Yet Jesus questions this identity and this purpose. You see these stones, he says, and he says plainly, all of this is going to be torn down. And he goes down to talk about wars and earthquakes, famine, plagues, here's some signs and persecution. Friends are going to betray friends and some will be arrested. Some even put he put death. This splendor is all going to end. Now that sounds like a sermon to terrify people, doesn't it? But read carefully, Jesus isn't trying to scare his followers into hiding. He's preparing them. He's giving them a map for what to do and the world gets unstable. The lesson is not to expect disaster, but when disaster comes, nowhere to lean. Malachi paints the same stark contrast, fire and furnace on one side, surprise, and healing on the other. He doesn't deny the judgment. He places it in the service of renewal. Out of heat comes light, doom, yes, but also the dawn.



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Together, these voices remind us that faith is not about escape. It's about endurance. Some things must crumble so that something more resilient can be born. The question is not whether the world will shake, but what we will lean on when it happens. That word "leaning" is a posture of faith. "Leaning" means admitting that we can't hold ourselves up by sheer effort. It means choosing a direction, orienting toward what lasts, which is love and truth, community, of course God. The opposite of leaning isn't standing tall, it's falling alone.

So, how do we lean this posture? There are several practices that are not simple, but not escapes that are habits of formation that we can engage in in these lean times. First, we can lean on the Word. Scripture gives us grammar of endurance. A verse in the pocket becomes a rope in the storm. Do not fear I am with you. Repeated, repeated, all throughout the Scriptures. These are not magic words, but a reminder that reality is deeper than panic. Read a few lines in the morning, repeat one phrase until it takes roots in you. The Word trains our imagination towards hope. We have to lean also on people. Hard times isolate. The forces that diminish us prefer us divided and self-absorbed. But community, real, imperfect, face-to-face community, rehumanizes us. So, when we show up to worship, when we make a call that we've been avoiding, when we cook a meal for someone weary, we're building a social architecture of endurance. Because faith is not a solo act. It's a choir that keeps on singing even when the tune shakes. And we're also called what? In lean times to lean into service. Scarcity tempts us to tighten our grip. But the gospel calls us to open our hands. Giving time and presence and resources to break that spell of fear. When we share the loaf, we participate in God's reconstruction of the world. The temple of stone may fall, but the temple built on compassion endures. Why do these practices work? Because spiritual formation happens through friction. The heat that consumes also refines. Our culture promises comfort, but the gospel promises us growth. Character, like muscle, strengthens from resistance. So, the furnace and the dawn are both parts of the same process.



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In the Bible, we see God call people into hard work in the midst of hard times. Noah building an ark before anyone believed rain would come. Moses leading a terrified people through the wilderness. David learning faith through battles. And maybe Jesus learned patience and craftsmanship in Joseph's Carpenter shop. The point is this that God builds masterpieces out of people who endure.

We're soon heading into Thanksgiving and then advent, the beginning of the Christian year. Advent is our season of waiting, but also of leaning. It's tradition and hope wrapped together. This year we must let Advent, not be a time of anxious shopping, but of practice leaning more prayers leaning into less fewer impulse buys, but more visits into the to the food pantry, fewer online carts. Let our worship be a place where we anchor ourselves and our generosity be the way we tell the world how God provides.

Here's a small experiment each morning, pick a verse to read, then pray Jesus today, I lean on you. And at night, recall the moment of grace where you leaned on the Lord through a kindness received or given. A week of such noticing can recalibrate the heart. Leaning won't spare us from hardship, but a will make hardship fertile, soil where compassion and courage and community take root. Because ultimately faith is not certainty about what will happen, it's trust that in what will emerge, we will stay open and present. So, as you drive by the snowflake lampposts and the glossy ads, ask yourselves, where will I put my weight. Into what will I lean? On the brittle security of things or on that love that endures. The Word that studies on people who hold you up. So, lean on the Word, lean on people, our friends and our neighbors, lean into service. And if we do these things, these lean times will not merely test us, but they will teach us how to live. Amen.