

## The Good News of Destruction

*As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."*

I think most of us have an extreme fear of destruction. Once something has been built, whether it is a relationship, a building, a form of worship, a faith community, or even a self-image, we have a very hard time believing that it should ever change.

We are especially fearful when we hear of any kind of change, even if it is good, that would require the destruction of something already familiar and in place in order to bring about renewal.

I think this is one reason why my imagination is sometimes captured by the Hindu god Shiva. Now, I have to say right away that I have no deep knowledge to share about Hinduism and what I am about to offer pretty much exhausts my knowledge! But I have happened across Shiva in books I have read and I am fascinated.

Shiva's role is to destroy the universe in order to re-create it.

Hindus believe his powers of destruction and re-creation are used even now to destroy the illusions and imperfections of this world, paving the way for beneficial change. According to Hindu belief, this destruction is not arbitrary, but constructive.

For whatever reason I find this permission, or even this invitation to pray for the "constructive" destruction of something old so that something new can be born in its place, very bold and liberating.

"Constructive destruction" sounds like the granddaddy of all oxymorons or maybe actually the beginning of a good parable!

But, as challenging as we in our culture seem to find this notion, I think our Biblical tradition actually encourages us to accept and expect this "constructive destruction."

As Jesus is telling his disciples about the destruction of the Temple, it is probably a concept that they can barely comprehend. And the images of the destruction to come, *before* the world would finally reflect the fullness of God's beauty, truth and justice, are horrific to contemplate.

Jesus tells us: "There will be wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famine, plague, dreadful portents, great signs from heaven, persecutions, and even betrayals from close relations."

Yet, Jesus' main message to us in Sunday's Gospel reading is not a message of war, famine and death. What Jesus tells us most clearly is "Do not be terrified, for these things always take place, but what my life will teach you is that new life awaits at the end of even the most horrible death."

Jesus' death and resurrection will become the master lesson in the art of God's re-creative power.

His death and new life is meant to be the pattern for us all. It is God's promise that at the end of one thing, God stands ready to do a whole new thing. Even the destruction of Jesus' earthly life marked the beginning of God's eternal promise that new life would always be birthed out of death---any death.

And I think it is so important to pay attention to the fact that when asked to name signs of the end of this current age, Jesus said that we should not be led astray into fear or anxiety by the

many painful things that can and will happen in a world where God's mercy and justice are not yet fully realized.

The Temple is where Jesus belongs by virtue of who he is. And yet, this is where he is most unwelcome because he challenges its corruption and pretentiousness.

As the disciples comment on its beauty, Jesus announces its destruction. This great Temple dedicated to the one true God was destroyed just a few decades after Jesus' made this prediction.

As a religious institution, it had become blind to its own intended mission and Jesus points out that no matter how beautiful it is, it comes to a sad end when it ignores the very One for whom it exists.<sup>[1]</sup>

Jesus' life will continue to teach us, if we allow it, how to live without fear in a time when all that we want to cling to—for good or for ill—seems to be slipping away.

Whether we are afraid of a death of a relationship, a way of life, a long held social belief, a political ideology, or the way we understand church, Jesus urges us to consider that clinging to dead things out of our fearfulness of what might be next is a painful existence.

He teaches us that none of these things is beyond God's power to re-create in new, life-giving ways—not without grief or some feelings of loss perhaps, but, if we let go of fear, the promise is that we find something infinitely more life giving.

And I think it is also important to recognize that just because something needs to be allowed to die or be destroyed in order to make room for something new, it does not always follow that what we must let go of is bad or has never been without value, deep meaning or purpose.

But no one thing is meant to be the one way or one answer for a lifetime or even an eternity. Not in institutions, relationships, or in all of life. We see this illustrated beautifully in God's created order: even beautiful, wonderful things need to die in order for other new and wonderful things to spring forth.

And because of God's re-creative power, not even a wrongful destruction like that of Jesus on the cross can kill God's ability to recreate something breathtakingly magnificent in its place.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Texts for Preaching, Year C, pg. 601.*