

Full Control

26th Sunday after Pentecost; Series C
Luke 21:5-28

In his recent book titled, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*, the author Nik Ripken chronicles the lives of Christians in regions of the world where they face intense persecution by totalitarian government regimes. While visiting a group of Christians in China he heard the following story that he records in his book:

“I met and interviewed yet another group of leaders (representing another major house-church movement) at my very last stop in China. I asked whether, when and how the oppressed could truly threaten a totalitarian oppressor. They offered this scenario in response: The security police regularly harass a believer who owns the property where a house-church meets. The police say, “You have got to stop these meetings! If you do not stop these meetings, we will confiscate your house, and we will throw you out into the street.” Then the property owner will probably respond, “Do you want my house? Do you want my farm? Well, if you do, then you need to talk to God because I gave this property to Him.” The security police will not know what to make of that answer. So they will say, “We don’t have any way to get to God, but we can certainly get to you! When we take your property, you and your family will have nowhere to live!”

And the house-church believers will declare, “Then we will be free to trust God for shelter as well as for our daily bread.” “If you keep this up, we will beat you!” the persecutors will tell them. “Then we will be free to trust God for healing,” the believers will respond. “And then we will put you in prison!” the police will threaten.

By now, the believers’ response is almost predictable: “Then we will be free to preach the good news of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, to the captives, to set them free. We will be free to plant churches in prison.” “If you try to do that, we will kill you!” the frustrated authorities will vow. And, with utter consistency, the house-church believers will reply, “Then we will be free to go to heaven and be with God forever” (Nic Ripken, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*).

Being free to trust that God is in control of all things. In the face of intense persecution from an oppressive government these Christians respond with boldness and confidence. They trust that only God, and no one else, is in *full control* of this world, their property, and even their very lives. And so, trusting confidently in this truth, these followers of Christ are left with a sense of complete freedom. They are free to be. They are free to trust in God’s provision and redemption for their whole being—their bodies and souls. What or who can then truly hurt them? What then can lead them to forsake such a confidence and forfeit such freedom?

St. Luke expresses that bold and freeing trust and confidence that God is in control of all things by suggesting that regardless of the circumstances that can bog us down in this weary world that Christians “straighten up and raise their heads, because their redemption is drawing near” (Lk 21:28). It is a confidence and trust that is so freeing. It is what God desires also for you and me as believers.

Jesus is speaking to a large crowd during the final week before his crucifixion. It is a crowd that consists of his twelve disciples, other followers of his, and still others that simply wanted to hear what he would say next and see what he

would do next. To this group Jesus not only lays before them the state of the fallen world in which they live. Jesus speaks about the reality of wars and natural disasters and famines and diseases.

In the middle of this conversation he turns away from the entire crowd generally and turns toward his Twelve Disciples specifically to tell them how hard it will be for them to confess and hold to the truth of God in a fallen world that does not seek God. After speaking to his disciples, Jesus turns back to the entire crowd and predicts a historically specific event that will show how bad things will get for that generation in 1st century Palestine. Forty years before it will take place, Jesus speaks about an event that would shake the ancient world and the people of Israel to its very core. He predicts with great detail the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem. These are the signs. This is the picture of a fallen world that does not seek God. Even after an event so horrific such as the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman army can you still trust confidently that I am in control? Can you still trust that I am in control to the point that you can still say, "I am free?"

What is the meaning and application of this text for us today as Christians in 21st century America? We open up a fresh copy of the Union-Tribune on a weekday morning to go along with our fresh cup of coffee and we feel a sense of weariness and helplessness as news of a typhoon, economic troubles, moral failures of politicians, robberies, homicides, suicides, and wars jump off the pages. Then we sit down at the close of our day, tune into the local news and find more of the same. How weary even we as Christians can become. How easy it is for a seed of doubt to slip in and grow—"Is God really in control?" we might think.

We live in a weary world and can easily become weary. Our trust and confidence in God's full control of all things is often tested. Jesus warned the crowd in the Gospel reading that these kind of "six-o'clock" news events are signs of a fallen world that does not trust in God and his authority and control of all things. He challenged them to endure by the grace of God (Lk 21:19). The Christians in China experience the signs of a fallen world in a way much more intense than us. They are challenged to endure by the grace of God. They are challenged to *be free to trust that God is in control of all things*

Let us be free to trust more firmly that God is in control of all things. The one who waited for the right time to send his only begotten Son into this fallen, broken, and sin-filled world to redeem and restore it, to redeem and restore you (Gal 4:4), he is in *full control*. Through the events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection during the last week of his life Jesus showed that he was in control. Even when his body hung on the cross, his followers were fleeing him in droves, and all seemed to be going wrong, your God was in control by showing that he is your redeemer. He was in full control on that Good Friday and three days later as he struggled with the forces and powers of this world to redeem you, to buy you back for himself through the innocent suffering and death of his beloved Son and the victorious rising from the dead.

God is in full control as he found the proper moment to bring you to a baptismal font to wash you clean of your sin and declare you as his holy son and daughter. He is still in full control as he works through his Spirit to strengthen the faith and trust that he created within your heart. Though you were once separated from God because of your Sin, now you are united with him. At one time you were experiencing death as the full consequence of your Sin and now you experience resurrection life in the same pattern as Christ, God's Son, your brother. Now you can live confidently in that

resurrection life regardless of the events and circumstances that happen around you and even to you. You are free to be who God redeemed you to be! You are free to be even as you await the Day that Christ returns. That Day will be the Day of Redemption (vs.28). Therefore, with the first disciples, with the Christians suffering in China and other parts of the world, with all the saints of God, "lift up your heads" and be prepared for this soon-coming Day. For God is always in control of what and who he created and recreated. Amen.