

I'm coordinating a weekly bible school for the kids at the seminary. There's been an explosion of kids, and well, I sorta missed telling the stories and doing crafts. This week we talked about Solomon's temple. Now, this isn't the temple that Jesus talks about (Solomon's was destroyed), but it was amazing. The biblical description is astounding—huge stones hewn from the side of mountains, covered with cedar and cypress, towering walls, enormous carvings of flowers, gourds, and astoundingly large cherubim. And then all that—covered in gold. Apparently, Solomon made God a very nice little home.

And the kids totally grooved on that. They loved the idea that God's house was beautiful, and they started talking about how beautiful their churches were. And then we got to make playdough and pipe-cleaner temples. Their creativity was fabulous, with grand archways and ornamentation that certainly defied the rules of engineering, and perhaps the laws of physics.

And I think most of us are right there with the kids. We love beautiful structures. Our beautiful windows, the high vaulted ceilings, this table. We love this neighborhood. This city. It is gorgeous, reminding us of God's splendor and lavish grace.

And into this love-fest, Jesus declares: The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down.

It is as if he takes all these good feelings, the warmth of this beauty, our desire to make a beautiful home for God, our love for this church and this place, it is as if Jesus takes all of this into his hand, twirls it around and sends it crashing to the ground, shattered into the pieces of our human frailty.

The folks who care for the property here can tell you, there will be a time when the stones will fall down. And the kids can assure you, playdough and pipe-cleaners don't last very long either.

And it's not as if we don't know that. Indeed, the beauty of these place, things, people, help us to cope, lifting our spirits above the despair of our temporality. Above the knowledge that indeed, all of these things we love so dearly will topple, crumble.

And I don't think Jesus is against that (at least not in this version of the Gospel), but he also knows that this won't be enough. These windows alone can't do it. This organ can't do it. The beautiful woodwork can't do it. The awesome play structure outside, can't do it. None of these things will ever be enough to counter the weight of hopelessness and despair that infects our world. That infects us.

We live in a time of war; insurrections. Famine and plagues ravage communities around the globe. Earthquakes devastate. And dreadful portents seem only to multiply.

There isn't a single building on the planet that can fix that. Playdough and pipe cleaners won't heal cholera, make the budgets balance, feed the homeless. I don't know about you—but for me this disparity, this shocking gap between beauty and despair. Creativity and destruction, splendor

and devastation—it hollows out a place in my gut, leaving me empty, wordless, dumbfounded. It is a gap I cannot cross.

And Stuck. Frustrated. Stammering and lost, it seems, without fail, that this is the precise moment that we are brought before the kings and governors, the cynical, the angry, the apathetic who say: So, how can you believe in this Jesus guy when so many people are suffering? Really? You buy that religion stuff? Why go through all that effort?

It's in these moments that I'm tempted to nod, politely agree, being a Christian is rough these days. And then change the subject.

But Jesus suggests something different, something braver. He suggests the very thing I feel completely incapable of doing. He says, unwaveringly: This is an opportunity for you to testify. Seriously? Sheesh. Um, Jesus, I wasn't really looking for "opportunities." Especially this kind. Testify. Witness. Tell your story.

It is into the reality of our utter brokenness and despair, the knowledge and certainty, that the whole world is crumbling around us, into the gap between beauty and despair that Jesus says: use your voice. Testify. Testify.

Now, there won't be any classes after church today to teach you what to say, how to craft your testimony. There are no style guidelines, and true testimony often breaks the rules of engineering and the laws of physics. But, thankfully, it Turns out, the testimony is already in you. You already know how to do it. No class required.

In fact, you're already doing it.

You see, on that day as the temple towered beautifully and forebodingly around them, Jesus made a promise, a promise even more loudly proclaimed in his death and resurrection, and boldly echoed today in this meal we will share.

Jesus says: So make up your minds not to prepare a defense in advance. For I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

Indeed—Jesus will be, is, our testimony. Seriously.

For indeed, even as we are surrounded by the frailty of these walls, we are also surrounded by the stories of God's action in this community, indeed Jesus working through us.

Every sandwich made for the Night Ministry Every stranger welcomed Every hand offered in peace Every child welcomed in these doors Every meal shared Every person that leaves this place, carrying the story of Resurrection into the world.

This is the testimony you're giving now. But indeed, it is nothing you prepared. It is God working through you. But This is the means by which we endure, the means by which we cross the gap. And we know that at last the sun of righteousness will rise, with healing in its wings. And when the end finally comes—we know, indeed we are assured that will be brought together into the completeness of our God.

And we also know that someday the beauty and playfulness of playdough and pipe-cleaners will be echoed throughout all of creation, and every child will enjoy that beautiful dawn breaking.