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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday in Advent (One-Year Series)

December 10, 2017

Text: Luke 21:25–36

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last week, we heard from God's Word that King Jesus entered Jerusalem with humility on a borrowed donkey in order to do the work His Father ordained for the salvation of the world. This week, we hear from God's Word about the condition of the world before our Lord's glorious and majestic 2nd Coming. We confess in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds that Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Saints of God, we must know that this world will not last forever. Today's reading from Luke's Gospel is intended to encourage us and all Christian believers as we see the increasing distress that will cover the world as the Lord's return draws closer.

Jesus' teaching in Luke gives a glimpse into God's perspective on how to understand the dramatic events of the Last Day. The Lord Jesus does not want us to be discouraged and afraid but to be encouraged and emboldened! Jesus said, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (vs. 28). Keep your heads lifted high! Don't be afraid nor be discouraged. King Jesus is coming soon and He will be set all things right. Before that great and awesome Day takes place, however, be aware that things will be difficult, physically and spiritually. Be encouraged while at the same time understand the signs of the times with wisdom and prudence!!

Today's Gospel text focuses primarily on disturbances in the created order; the physical world. Signs in the sun and moon and star, perplexity among the nations of the world arising because of the roaring of the seas and waves (vs. 25). The apostle Paul, in Romans 8, also describes the upheaval the natural world experiences because of man's corruption and fall into sin. He says that all creation is groaning and convulsing under the weight of sin as a woman in the midst of hard, hard labor pains. The entire visible realm has been subjected to the decay and disorder of our sin. And so there are earthquakes and famines, disease and pestilence, hurricanes and floods and odd weather. As the Last Day approaches, God's orderly creation will

increasingly become unstable and chaotic. The tumult of the creation will bear witness to that fact.

The Lord Jesus has given us a glimpse into the future, so that we need not be shocked or overwhelmed when these things take place. We do not walk in darkness nor do we live in ignorance. Christ is the light and life of the world. All the handwringing that is currently taking place over global warming or climate change, pick whichever phrase you want, should rather be a cause of confidence and hope for us Christians. Jesus describes such worry and angst as “people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world” (vs. 26). When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. In other words, Christ is coming soon. And for us believers, that is good news indeed!!

The unbelievers and the ungodly do not discern the signs properly. The book of Revelation describes their condition most tragically when it says unbelievers did not repent under God’s chastening hand. Instead, they became even more hardened in their sin and rebellion. Jesus warns us not to follow their ways: “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (vs. 34).

Be on guard! Be alert! Don’t be trapped by sin and worry so as to be caught by that Day unexpectedly. The signs are all there: Christ is coming soon. To illustrate His point, Jesus said, “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (vs. 29–31). I know winter is just beginning but don’t we get “spring fever” when things begin to warm up and the buds on the trees begin to form? When we see those natural signs, we know spring and summer are just around the corner! Since we are so equipped to discern the signs of the seasons, we ought also be instructed on how to discern the signs of the times. Through the lens of God’s Word, read and understand the signs pointing to the end!! By so doing, be encouraged and stay awake.

The Lord Jesus gives us two sources of encouragement and preparation in today’s text. First, the surety and confidence of His holy Word. Vs. 32–33, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” God’s Word is the light that pierces the darkness of this world. His Word gives insight into the depths of our heart and soul. The wisdom of this world will decay and crumble into utter nothingness. But Christ’s

Word will endure. Not only His Word about the Last Day, but also the Word He says to us all: words of love, forgiveness, faithfulness, victory, and hope. Cling to the truth and purity of God's holy Word, dear saints. Read and study at home. Do all that is within you to read and study God's Word as a family. Parents with children. Husbands with wives. Grandparents with children and grandchildren. Friends with friends. Young people, as you begin dating, seek out those with whom you can worship and pray and hear God's Word. Embrace the discipline and blessing of a regular, faithful, hearing and study of God's Word. Everything else will pass away. But not Word says, Jesus.

The second source of encouragement and preparation is prayer. Jesus says, "But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (vs. 36). Martin Luther once said that prayer is the true work of the Christian. And Scripture teaches "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16 NKJV). The time for fervent prayer is now, prayers for family, friends, church, country, and world. Never should we consider prayer as the final, last effort, when everything else has failed kind of approach to the difficulties of life. Rather, it should be the first response coupled with God's Word. What I said earlier about reading God's Word with family and friends is echoed here. I trust you will understand me properly in what I'm about to say. I want Immanuel/St. John's and all her members to be known as a place and people of fervent prayer and diligent study of God's Word. Those Lutherans take their Bibles and their prayers seriously. And what will naturally follow such a commitment is Biblical preaching, faithful worship centered around God's Word and Sacraments, day to day living under the grace of Christ, etc.

In today's text, Jesus admonishes us to pray so that we are able "to stand before the Son of Man" (vs. 36). With prayer and study of God's Word, we ought to train our desires and affection to seek God's presence. The psalmist writes, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). Notice the language of desire and habit. I will seek after the Lord...all the days of my life, to gaze upon the Lord and to inquire in his temple." Thus the writer to the Hebrews admonished his congregational members to be regular and faithful in regular church attendance and pursuing good works:

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love

and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews. 10:23–25).

The reason we desire and seek the presence of the Lord in Church and day by day through His Word and prayer is Jesus has called us to be His own dear children; He is faithful to us. Through His death and resurrection, we are able to stand before Him in purity without fear or shame. Listen to the psalmist in Psalm 24:3–6. As you listen, I want you to hear these words as the baptized, justified, beloved children of redemption that you are:

³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Jesus has cleansed your hands, hearts, and soul from every stain and sin. Because of Christ Jesus, you have already received blessing and righteousness that endures for eternity. Do not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, says Jesus. Why? Because those things only seek to choke out the source of true joy, peace, and contentment. But know this. Christ’s work of redemption completed on your behalf cannot be undone by the transitory afflictions of this life. His Word reveals the true character and nature of the work He has done and continues to do for you. And Christian prayer seeks to live in that holy place of God’s presence where righteousness, blessing and salvation are found. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

The End Times and the 2nd Coming of Jesus are not sources of fear or anxiety for us Christians. Instead, we believe Jesus to be true to His Word. And with confident, triumphant prayer we straighten up and raise our heads because our redemption is drawing near. King Jesus is coming. Amen and amen.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.