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

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28B)

November 15, 2015

Text: Mark 13:1–13

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

As you know, I've never really been one to give my sermons titles. But if I were to give one for today, it might be "The Beginning of the End." The gospel reading for today and next week are from Mark 13, the "Little Apocalypse" as it's been sometimes called. The theme is the end times.

Jesus spoke these words during Holy Week; His death and resurrection for the salvation of the world are just a few short days away. It appears the disciples were having "a tourist moment." They're overwhelmed with the splendor, history, and grandeur of the Temple in Jerusalem. Vs. 1, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful building!" This was Jerusalem's 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, finished in 516 B.C. King Herod began renovating the Temple around 20 B.C. and it was still under construction when Jesus was preaching and teaching. By all accounts, it was a magnificent structure. The wealth and pride of the Jewish people (and her leaders) was poured, pounded, and carved into each stone.

The Lord Jesus says this about those "wonderful stones": "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." That's shocking! Unthinkable! And to the Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, it was seditious. But it did come true. The Jewish war with Rome began in 66 AD. Four years later, the Temple was destroyed by the Romans under General Titus. In 70 AD, every stone was cast down. The destruction was utterly complete.

It appears the disciples are shocked into silence. Mark doesn't record any reactions or statements until they reach the Mount of Olives, a short walk from the Temple area. According to vs. 3, only 4 disciples (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) manage to ask Jesus about this dreadful news. Their two-fold question is found in vs. 4, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

The Lord describes the end of the Last Days using the last days of the Temple in Jerusalem. All the events our Lord describes happened in one way or another before 70 AD when Jerusalem's Temple was destroyed. These same type of events will also occur but with greater intensity and on a larger scale. But we must notice that these signs are just that, signs. They are indicators of what will happen but they aren't the main thing. Jesus says as much in vs. 7, "This must take place, but the end is not yet."

What will happen with ever increasing intensity during the Last Days? Jesus begins by warning us and all His disciples that false prophets and false christs will arise. "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray" (vs. 5-6). The days leading up to Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming will be noted for various messianic figures claiming to be the world's savior from her many complex problems. History is filled with many such false Messiahs, false prophets, and false teachers. The Church should be aware of their deadly, seductive ministries, but "the end is not yet."

In vs. 7-8 Jesus describes an increase in natural disasters and wars between nations as the Last Days approach. Can a week go by without hearing about global climate change? Regardless of what you think about the political and scientific conclusions being publicized about climate change, it does seem that hurricanes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters are on the rise. Now folks are worried about El Nino. Will it be as big as predicted?

The other sign (vs. 7-8) is wars and rumors of wars. You've heard this before but the general consensus is that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was bloodier than all other centuries combined!! We're fifteen years into the new millennium and our country has been in a state of war for 14 of those years, since 9-11-2001. And just when it seemed we couldn't be shocked any further by global terrorism, more than 120 people were killed in Paris this past Friday. Wars and rumors of wars but "the end is not yet."

As an aside, dear saints, if you haven't been praying about the rise of Islamic militants then you need to start. Not only is Islam a false religion which is leading millions away from saving faith in Jesus but it's also being used to justify the slaughter of innocent life. In Paris this weekend. In Africa through groups like Boko Haran. In the Middle Easter through ISIS. The time for prayer and faithful vigilance has come.

Jesus isn't trying to frighten His disciples. In fact, Jesus describes these tumultuous events as being "the beginning of the birth pains" (vs. 8). These aren't the pains of

death, but the travail of new life. Every mom knows exactly what Jesus is talking about here. The pain of childbirth is excruciating but there is rejoicing when a child is born. After the pains and convulsion of sin and human suffering, new life arises never to be extinguished or reduced for all eternity. At His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, Jesus will bring with Him the new heavens and the new earth. Thy kingdom come we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

In vs. 9–13 speaks about persecution Christians will suffer in the days leading up to the Temple's destruction and before His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. Governments and people in general will turn against Christians. Vs. 9 & 11 specifically describe official, governmental opposition. Vs. 12 describes Christians being betrayed even by their closest family and friends. There is historical evidence that such betrayals did take place in the years leading up to the Temple's destruction. Ample historical evidence retells of Christians being targeted by governmental authorities: Emperor Nero and other local Roman authorities, the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the synagogues who issued public, corporal punishment against Christians.

In the Last Days leading up to Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, Christians will face increased opposition. Governmental and religious persecution will increase. It's illegal to be a Christian in most Muslim countries. Even secular sociologists fear that entire Christian communities in Iraq and the Middle East are being driven out of existence by ISIS. The orthodox Church in China must work and worship in secret lest they be arrested. Organizations like Voice of the Martyrs and Open Doors exist so that the world can know about the desperate plight of Christian martyrs around the world.

And dear saints of God, our own dear country is quickly terming away from the free exercise of religion. The cultural elite are now interpreting the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to mean the freedom to assemble for worship. But such religion freedom does not apply to people wishing to live out their religious faith in their homes, places of work, and venues of entertainment.

Increasingly, any person who objects to laws or practices which harm the institution of marriage as being one man with one woman (such as same-sex marriage, cohabitation, divorce, etc), is viewed as being a bigot. Law suits are mounting against men and women who want to live out their Christian faith on the job and in the economic arena. These are the days we are in now in America.

Twice Jesus says His Church will be hated because of Him (vs. 9, 13). The sobering truth is that if you want the world to like you, don't claim the name of Jesus. For His disciples will be tested and sifted and tried by fire, so that only a genuine hope, one fixed upon Christ and nurtured by His sobering Word, can remain pure and unshaken (Franzmann).

And yet there are two great and wonderful promises spoken by our Lord. The first, "And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations" (vs. 10). God's people will not sit idly by. They didn't in the days before the Temple's destruction nor will we in the Last Days. The Gospel will prevail and prosper in spite of opposition. One early Christian said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church (Tertullian). History has proved him right. And the Church is growing world-wide in spite of persecution.

The second promise is "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (vs. 13). These Last Days call for faithful activity coupled with patient endurance, not fearful speculation and idleness. When the end comes, the faithful will be vindicated for they will receive the crown of life in the resurrection of the just. It is this enduring hope that will bring us to the end in victory and triumph.

In Christ and through His Word and Sacraments, we will stand firm until the end. Baptism created the saving faith within our hearts and minds. The read and proclaimed Word declares us righteous, free, and redeemed. The Body and Blood of Jesus nourish us in our Lord's forgiveness, giving us enduring strength and lasting joy. From today's epistle reading we heard, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not 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" (Heb. 10:24–25).

Jesus' teaching in Mark 13 is sobering. But we ought not to be afraid. Christ has triumphed. He is living. Everything He did in His suffering, death, and resurrection is for you, me, and all people. These are the things we should be telling our children. Christ overcame the world. And so shall we. After all things are said and done, Jesus and His Church stand victorious!!

✠ 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.