

Written Copy: Luke 21:10-15 “An Opportunity to Witness”

23rd Sunday @ Pentecost-Proper 28

Sunday, November 13th, 2022

Text: Luke 21:10-15

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

The text's intent

Prepare the Church for all that must come in these end times so that we see it as what must happen according to Christ's plan and purpose. The temple destroyed in order to point to the temple made without human hands and the once and for all sacrifice given for all men. Man's inhumanity against man, natural disasters, and cosmic disturbances that emphasize the world is not our home, that unbelievers need to turn in repentance to Christ while we the Church hold fast to faith in Christ. We are called to witness our steadfast faith to a world in fearful anxiety of what is happening and fearful expectation of what is to come. We do so through the work of the Holy Spirit to plant the head and heart knowledge of faith in Christ in us who will at the proper time provide for us His powerful witness. He gives us a foreshadowing of the destruction and judgement coming on the Last Day for all unbelievers in the foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem. And as a reminder for even us believers that our earthly kingdom will one day perish, but if we give up our allegiance to that kingdom in place of the eternal reign and rule of Christ by faith we will be kept safe for that eternity to come. As the unbelievers cower in fear as they watch their world turn upside down and reality shaken, we the Church are called to lift up our heads in joyful expectation of the glory about to be revealed. The world looks to eternal punishment while we look to the glorious eternal gift that Christ redeemed us from eternal punishment to have by faith.

Focus Statement:

Christ has made us His temple, His dwelling place on earth. He redeemed us from the fate of eternal destruction and has given us His Spirit to grow our knowledge and faith in Him and His Gospel. Through that He promises to keep us in faith through all that is to come so that when He returns, we lift up our heads and hearts in joyful expectation.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We like to ignore the prophetic revelation of the last days hoping that it won't really happen. We like to live in the safe notion that somehow the earthly kingdom we have built will be spared. But by ignoring Jesus' warnings we may find ourselves unprepared for what He has declared must come.

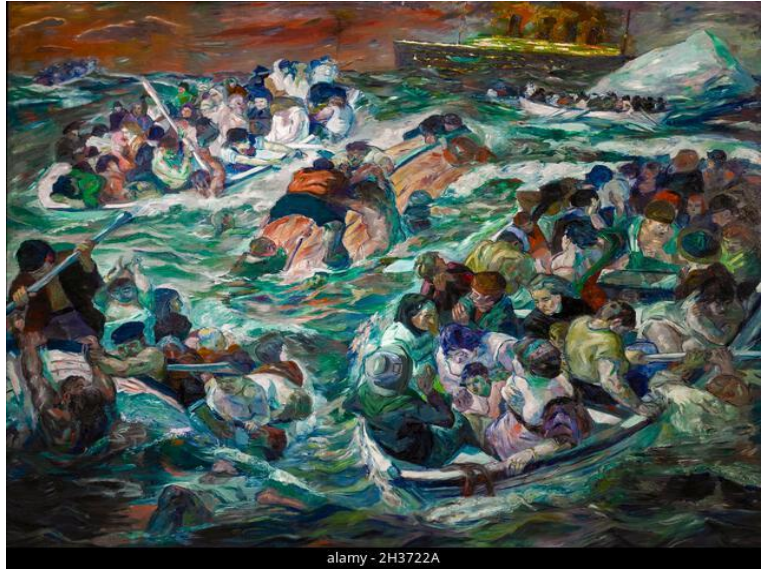
What the hearer should do as a result:

See the times of trials, suffering, and persecution as our opportunity to grow in our own faith and be witnesses of the Gospel to a world cowering in fear over their world and earthly kingdom unraveling.

Subject Sentence: Faithfully suffering as Christ's witness to the lost

Introduction

It is said “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” And this saying is never truer than when it comes to the beholding of paintings. One of my former Seminary Professors tells a story about going to an art gallery with a lady friend. One of the paintings that they beheld for a few minutes was this one: Max Beckmann’s The Sinking of the Titanic. After gazing at it for a few moments his lady friend remarked how beautiful she thought it was. But



understandably, he couldn't see it. What he saw, as do I, and perhaps you as well, is the tragic situation of innocent people clinging for dear life to whatever they can grab hold of as the vessel nicknamed “The Unsinkable Ship” went down, taking with it to its watery grave more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

Perhaps you see a similar kind of image in your mind as the Gospel Lesson for today was read. Last Sunday we had the imagery of “All the Saints, who from their warfare rest”: a lovely hopeful image. Today’s Gospel Lesson is filled with war, destruction, persecution, and the very fabric of reality being loosened. But could there be something beautiful hidden in this Gospel for our spiritual eyes to behold and then share?

Jesus’ Warnings About the Shipwreck Come

Our Gospel Lesson opens with the disciples beholding what they considered to be a thing of beauty, the temple in Jerusalem. And had we been there with them we probably would’ve agreed. It was at that time a wonder to behold, constructed out of huge white stones and adorned with beautiful tapestries and golden and bronze doors. Since it represented the place where God was present and worshiped and was offered sacrifices, the disciples expected it would last for a long time, if not forever.

But Jesus had news for them. The day was coming not too far off in the future, perhaps 30 some years later, when the Romans would besiege the city because its leaders had rebelled against Caesar’s rule. They would encircle it, break through its mighty walls, and then totally destroy the temple, leaving no stone left on top of another. Thus, it remains to this day. All that is left is a remnant of the outer court walls, known today as “The Wailing Wall”.

The Lord allowed this as a message to His people who had refused to believe in the One who had come to be the temple of God made without hands, the very one prophesying this. The message was that a temple with a sacrificial altar was no longer needed since the Lamb of God had provided the final sacrifice outside the city at the hill called the Skull, or in Aramaic Golgotha, or in Latin: Calvary. And there was no need for a temple to house the presence of God or be the focal point of worship. Jesus was Himself the very presence of God among men. And He had come to build a new temple, one made without hands, of which He is the cornerstone that the builders had rejected. By faith in Him as Lord and Savior, He would call people to be His living temple, His Church, the place where His Spirit resides, and where true worship of the LORD is found. That living temple is a hidden thing of beauty that the disciples couldn't see at the time because they were fixated on a lesser thing of beauty that was on its way out.

The disciples are understandably upset hearing about the temple and want more information on the sign foretelling when this event is about to happen. But Jesus is using the destruction of the temple as a symbolic picture of the greater destruction that will encompass in all things on the Last Day. Much of what Jesus warns them about are very familiar events for us in our day: wars and uprisings of nations against nations and factions against factions, great earthquakes, famines, hurricanes, wildfires, plagues and sickness, even worries about such dire celestial events like planet killing asteroids.

But as the Last Day approaches Jesus describes an unbelievable picture of the very fabric of reality coming undone. **Luke 21:25-26** ²⁵ **"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** All these things, just like the temple, are God's witness to all mankind that this world and our life in it are not as permanent as we sometimes dream them to be.

Man's inhumanity against man will continue to grow. And we see that already in the increased violence here in our own country. And Jesus says it will get worse especially for us who are carry His name, we who are His temple made without hands. We are a living witness that the unbelieving world is not in control, that there is indeed a Creator God of whom they must answer to. Rather than do so, and motivated by Satan speaking into their sinful hearts, they seek to silence our witness through persecution. This is already happening in other countries especially in Islamic countries where Christians are a minority. And to further confuse our witness, as we learned last Sunday, there will be men who actually claim to be Christ Himself: God in the flesh, or they will preach to us a different Jesus than Scripture gives us.

As our country and culture moves farther away from holding to the moral laws of the 2nd table of the 10 commandments, we will eventually experience persecution too. Some of this could come from outside vigilante groups, as when Roe vs. Wade was overturned by the Supreme Court and people attacked Church buildings with graffiti and breaking windows. But one day real persecution could come from our own government. As culture increasingly accepts and even promotes things such as transgenderism, same sex marriage, cohabitation, and abortion, how long before our witness of these things as being sins is considered hate speech for which we are condemned and punished for? And then how long before our testimony that Jesus Christ is the only name under heaven by which one must be saved is labelled as intolerant of other faiths and we are persecuted for it?

It's one thing for this persecution to come from those we don't really know. But Jesus warns that it can come from within our families. While His Gospel message brings peace between us and the Father, and therefore opens the door for peace between us and our fellow man, it will also at times create deep division, even among family members. The Gospel not only declares Jesus to be our Savior, but also to be our Lord, a Lord that sinful mankind neither wants nor will accept because it would mean they are no longer in charge of their life, can no longer do what they want to do without guilt or shame.

All of these things Jesus not only warns us will happen, but He declares that they must happen. The book of Revelation shows them coming from the hand of Christ Himself to fulfill His purpose and plan of all that must happen before His return. In this shipwreck of a future where can we find anything beautiful?

The Spiritual Beauty of Being Hidden in the Ark

Luke 21:17-19 ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

How is it that as we are hated by all not a hair on our heads will perish? Because even as this earth becomes a shipwreck sinking into eternal destruction you and I have been called by faith to rest securely in the Ark that is the Church. Just as Noah escaped the destruction that surrounded him through God's gift of the ark, we will escape this Last Day destruction safely placed in the Lord's strong yet loving hands. Those hands protected you from eternal destruction by receiving the nails that were pounded into the cross. They hung there affixed to that cross so that you might be redeemed from the eternal destruction that awaits all of unbelieving humankind. Those hands paid the redemption price as their owner, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ offered up His very life for you, taking your sin, your punishment, and your suffering hell for you, while giving to you the credit for His perfectly obedient life.

Those hands reach out and give you this wonderful gift of redemption through the Word and the Sacraments made available here in the Ark of the Church. His Spirit is at work through them planting faith in your heart and keeping that faith alive. He is at work doing that even as all the calamities of war, natural disasters, famines and plagues, and persecutions swirl around you like waves crashing into those survivors of the shipwreck. We are not holding on to a piece of wreckage alone, the strong hands of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit are reaching out to you through the means of grace. When you fall into sin His Spirit is the lifeline to draw you back into the safety of His hands, placing you back in His ark. He will never let go of you. While your sinful broken body will one day perish in this world, not a hair on your head will be missing from the eternity to come. We endure through all that is to come in our lifetime by faith and trust in the promises of Christ. And that enduring means life with Him now and eternal life to come.

Jesus' Call to Witness in the Midst of Our Shipwrecked World

Luke 21:13-15 ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

So why is the Church made to suffer alongside the unbelievers who are perishing in this shipwreck of a world? So that we can be Jesus hand reaching out to them, throwing them the lifeline that is the Gospel message. We are the Church in this broken sinful world so we can come alongside those who are struggling under the weight of sin, the weight of disfunction of families, sexuality, crime and man's inhumanity to man, natural disaster, hunger, and bear witness to the grace and love of Christ Jesus in word and action. And we are made able to do all this by the Holy Spirit who is at work withing us.

Jesus tells us not to meditate on what we will say beforehand, that He will give us a mouth and wisdom. But how does that gift come to you? Through the working of the Holy Spirit as you read, study, and meditate on His Word, and through His powerful working and strengthening in the Lord's Supper. Jesus does not want us to have a script typed out to read from. But He does want us to grow in knowledge and faith toward Him. And through that He imparts divine wisdom. As you hear and study His Word, is it not possible that the very things you meditate on are the life preservers someone else you meet will need, or perhaps the lifeline that pulls you back safely into His ark after it feels like you've fallen overboard?

Conclusion

I'm not sure what my professor's friend saw as a thing of beauty in this painting. But I've been wondering if maybe it was those survivors who found something to cling to, something that saved them from being among the 1,500 who drowned.



How often do we like to think of our life as unsinkable as the Titanic was supposed to be? How much do you see going on in the world today that shows us this is not the case? Jesus tells us that this world is sinking into eternal destruction. And all those without faith will sink with it into eternal destruction in hell. But Jesus has redeemed us from sinking down into eternal death through His life, death, and resurrection. And He has called us into the safety of His ark, the Church, through the faith we receive in Word and Sacrament. While we will still suffer through all the trials and tribulations that He declares must happen, we are protected by His Spirit who is living within us and working to keep our faith alive. He will guide us through all that must happen so that we land on the threshold of eternal life to come. And along the way He is working to empower us through the Gospel message to throw lifelines to those sinking around us, so that they might join us on the shore of eternal life too. May He continue that work in your life and mine until the Last Day. Amen.