

Written Copy: "Watch Yourselfs - Luke 21:29-36
Proper 28-22nd Sunday @ Pentecost
Sunday November 17th. 2019

Text: Luke 21:33-36

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁴ "But watch yourselfs 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. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Exegetical Statement: Luke 21:5-36

Jesus uses the disciples' praise and wonder over the beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem to teach them concerning what they will face in the near and distant future after He has finished His passion and ascended to heaven. We are not to fall in love with or put our hopes in the beauty of temporal possessions or even our temporal lives because none of that will last. He warns us of what the future holds: wars and revolutions that affect world order, and terrible natural disasters. Along with suffering through these things the Church will suffer persecution for its confession of Jesus Christ including being arrested and thrown in jail along with being made to stand before those in power. We are to see and know this happens as our opportunity to witness our faith, hearing Jesus promise that His Spirit will provide for our testimony as long as we stay in His Word. We will be betrayed by our blood relation as well as those whom we call our family of faith. Some will lose their life. But none of us will lose our faith or our eternal life as we stand in faith to Christ. These things will serve to strengthen our faith through which we are willing to forfeit our earthly lives and existence for the eternal relationship and life we are given in Christ. He then provides a description of the horror that will be Jerusalem's' destruction and uses that as a prefiguring of the horror that will befall all the world as the Last Days close in. Men will be overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness to the point of suicide. There will be signs in the heavens as the very power that holds the universe is shaken and disrupted. The Christ will return in power and glory. At this time the world will hang its head and try to hide. But we the Church are to rise up in exaltation and lift up our eyes to greet our Savior who comes to fulfill the redemption of His Church and the whole universe. We are to consider all these things not as terrors to be afraid of but as signs of fulfillment that all Christ has promised is coming to pass, including His promise of salvation for His Church. Therefore we are to pay attention to ourselves and seek to remain in repentant faith. The Holy Spirit will work in us through Word and Sacrament to keep us in true faith by which on the Last Day we can and will stand before Him as He opens the gates to eternal life.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came to take our punishment and all that we have done that would deserve God's judgment and vengeance upon us. Jesus provided the signs leading up to the Last Day for His Church that as they occur we would not lose hope but remain in faith He has given us His Spirit to protect us and keep us in faith using all that happens will work to strengthen our faith and allow us to witness it to the world that some may be saved

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

As God brings punishment and vengeance upon the unbelieving world, we can find ourselves joining in the world's fear and anxiety. If we let our love for this life draw us away from Christ then His return may find us caught in the same trap of eternal death as the world.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Remain awake in faith. Make use of the Word and Sacrament so that we live out lives in repentant faith. Put that faith into action not protecting our earthly existence but sacrificially loving others with the means God has given us.

Subject Sentence: Remain in faith to escape judgment on the Last Day

As some of you may know I am a fan of Rod Serling's Twilight Zone and Night Gallery. But I've never been a fan of slasher movies such as "Friday the 13th", "Nightmare on Elm Street", or "Texas Chainsaw Massacre". I like scary and suspenseful stories, but those filled with blood, guts, and gore. What really bothers me in those slasher films is how the victims always seem to make truly stupid choices that put them in harms way such as: going into a dark room without turning on the light, going down into the creepy basement, or heading outside when you hear a strange noise. So I really laugh when I see this commercial that nails the slasher movie stupidity: *Show "Geicho Good Choices Horror Movie Ad"*

We recognize how this group makes poor choices. In fact you may accuse me of making poor choices for my love of Rod Serling and Stephen King stories. But as we consider what Jesus is telling us in our Gospel Lesson today, do we sometimes make poor choices concerning our spiritual health and wellbeing? Could our love of this life and the pleasures of this world leave us unprepared for the day of our Savior's return?

Jesus presents this teaching as a reaction to the disciples' admiration and amazement over the beauty that was the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the life work of King Herod the Great and was still being worked on after his death. He had expanded it to twice the size of the temple erected by the exiles when they returned from Babylon. Josephus a Jewish man who served as a historian for Rome described it as being a truly magnificent structure. Herod used huge white marble blocks in its construction. It was adorned with beautiful gifts that hung on its interior and exterior walls. Not to mention the gold- and silver-plated gates and doors. Josephus said that if one stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and temple that it would shine like a precious jewel. Imagine what went through the disciples minds when Jesus prophesied the future that would befall this remarkable building: total destruction; not one stone left upon another.

They wanted to know when this would happen and what would be the signs leading up to it. Jesus knows that the destruction of the temple is only the tip of the iceberg. The Church will face worse things before His return on the Last Day. And so He began a discourse using what would happen in 40 years to the temple and Jerusalem as a prefiguring of what would

come upon the Church and the world from the time of His ascension to His return in glory. He wanted them, as well as us to be prepared.

Many of the things He tells us should come as no surprise. They've been going on for all of our lives. There have been huge world wars and smaller regional conflicts, police actions, and terrorism. There have been significant natural disasters by way of earthquakes, hurricanes and damaging tornados, floods and Tsunamis. It's one thing when we observe these things on the news happening elsewhere. But when they happen to one of us or someone we love, it's enough to shake one's faith.

He warns the Church that we will fall under increasing persecution. The unbelieving world will grow to hate us because we confess faith in Christ. It will seek to persecute us as government and society increasingly comes under control of Satan and his anti-Christ. It seeks to outlaw what we confess and hold as truth. The office of the Anti-Christ that we discussed last Sunday is already at work in the efforts to keep abortion, killing of innocent children in the womb, legal in the name of a woman's choice. It's at work in the laws allowing same-sex marriage which Scripture calls an abomination. It's at work in public schools as young as kindergartners who are encouraged to explore their sexuality and see if perhaps Johnnie would be happier as Janie. And as we stand by the truth of God's Scripture and oppose these things, we will increasingly face persecution as small minded, intolerant bigots. Even our Scriptural confession from **Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** is attacked because it makes us intolerant toward all faiths. Our life here in the United States has been blessed. We are free to worship as we desire without any serious repercussions for the most part. But Jesus' warning to us is don't think this peace will last. The serious persecution that the Christian church faces abroad from ISIS and other extremist leaders could one day find its way here

Christ warns that persecution will come not just from the outside unbelieving world and government but also from within. From our own families: our blood relation as well as those we consider to be our brothers and sisters in Christ. As the pressure outside of the

Church pushes in how sure can we be that we will remain immune from the way that ELCA has gone in embracing all things in the name of love and acceptance?

We have lived in an era of relative peace and tranquility in this country. But Christ doesn't promise that it will last. On the contrary Revelation shows times of strife and destruction allowed by God as vengeance and judgment is poured out upon an unbelieving world. Jesus prophetic description of the destruction of Jerusalem is a foreshadowing of what is to come before as we approach the Last Day. **(Luke 21:20-24)** ²⁰ **"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."** Josephus described the destruction of Jerusalem as the death of 1.1 Million Jews and 97,000 being taken away as captives. At the height of the siege things had gotten so bad that he described children being killed and cooked for food. This Jesus says as a foreshadowing of what is to come here on this earth. As the world goes to hell in a handbasket and our faith becomes increasingly persecuted how well will you and I be able to stand firm in our faith?

Jesus tells us these things not so that we will live in fear and despair, not so that we will lose all hope. On the contrary despite these things He gives us a great reason to have hope. He says in **Luke 21:33** **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."** What words are these that shall not pass away no matter how awful things get? All the promises we have in Him through the Gospel Message.

God's heart desire is not in destruction but in salvation. **John 3:16-18** ¹⁶ **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes**

in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” God so loved the world that He created that He sent His Son to die for it. Not just for some, but for the whole world’s sins. And in this very Gospel Message He works to create the faith needed to believe and thus receive His gift of eternal life. It is because many of those whom He died for refuse His free gift love that they remain in the state they were born, condemned, part of the devil’s kingdom, and sharing in his eternal destiny.

But what about us who believe? Hear Christ’s word to us that stands true forever: **1 John 2:1-2** **“¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”** He gave His Son for us to be our propitiation: our atoning sacrifice for sin. So that even as we continue to sin Christ’s death continues to atone for them. His suffering and death was the pouring out of God’s anger over our sin. Because we hold fast to Christ as this sacrifice on our behalf this is no anger due against us.

The unbelieving world stands as enemies of God. But you and I through our Baptism are called something else. According to Christ’s words that will never pass away from **1 John 3:2** **“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”** As those who have been declared by Christ to be God’s precious children, those who in our baptism were marked as such and given His Holy Spirit, He comes on the Last Day not to send us to the Eternal Lake of Fire but to welcome us into the Eternal Paradise that will be the newly restored Heaven and Earth where we will live in peace and joy and happiness forever.

Jesus gives to us this solemn prophetic description of what is to come not to scare us or drive us to despair. But to call us to remain close in faith toward Him. To as He says in **Luke 21:34-36** **“³⁴ 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. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay**

awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." In this day and age when things are going well it's easy to take our faith for granted. It's easy to fall into the trap of making the cares and pleasures of this life more important than our relationship with Jesus. We become weighed down with a love for the world that is heaped upon us gradually so that by the time it becomes all consuming we may not even realize we given up our relationship with Christ in order to shoulder it.

Jesus tells us to "stay awake". He is calling us to live out our faith through participation in Word and Sacrament worship, participation in Bible Study, regular prayer life, and works of love and service for the Church. As Paul instructs us in **Philippians 2:12-13** ¹² **Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**" We do our part to remain active in our faith knowing the Holy Spirit working in our lives doing His miraculous work of protecting and growing our faith so that when Jesus returns, we will stand before Him ready to receive His gift of eternal life in full. This fulfills Jesus promise which stands forever in **John 10:27-28** ²⁷ **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."**

The characters in slasher movies make poor choices. The unbelieving world in its refusal to believe the Gospel and it's persecution of Christ's Church commissioned to preach it makes poor choices. As sinners we too make poor choices when we elevate our love for this world over our love for our Savior. But He sends this message as Law to call us back. And gives to us His Gospel promises that will never pass away: that He has taken all God's wrath over our sin and gives to us the gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. In Baptism He has given us His Spirit to keep pointing out our poor choices and to move us to make better ones, faithful ones. And so live by His promise that on the Last Day we will stand with Him and enjoy His presence forever in eternal life. May this promise and the faith that comes with it guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen