

Sermon on Mark 13:5-11
Pastor David Wietzke
Reformation Sunday (B)
November 4, 2018



Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. (Mark 13:5-11)

"Prepared, not scared"

You and I live in one of the least disaster-prone areas of the country and maybe the world. God only knows what the future holds, of course, but based on history we don't get a lot of disasters. We don't get many earthquakes. We don't get many tornadoes. We don't get affected by hurricanes a whole lot. And we don't even get many floods or blizzards. It's probably something we should be more thankful for than we are.

I grew up in "tornado alley" where the sirens went off every month for tests and in most years a couple of times for real tornado warnings. If you live in California you need to be ready for earthquakes all the time and schools do "earthquake drills." When I was in South America in southern Chile they have "volcano sirens" because the resort town I was in was at the foot of a very active volcano. But people who live in those areas don't live in constant fear of disasters. They are prepared, but not scared.

And that fits pretty well with what Jesus had to say in our Gospel reading today. He talked about some pretty awful things happening. Wars and economic hardships, Christians being beaten and put on trial for their lives. Jesus tells us that these are not worst-case scenarios or remote possibilities, but events we are to expect. But the overall tone of his words is-- **DON'T BE SCARED; RATHER, BE PREPARED** for what is coming as we look forward to the eternal salvation that is ours through him. Reformation Day is a day to celebrate the truths of the Word of God that make us prepared and not scared!

I. Prepared for religious deceivers

There are 3 things that Jesus tells us we ought to be prepared for. **Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and**

will deceive many." The first thing to be prepared for is - religious deceivers who speak in Jesus' name.

There are many places in the Bible where we are warned about the danger of false messages--not just those that are "out there" in the world but within the Christian Church itself! The people that Jesus tells us to watch out for speak in Jesus' own name and yet they deceive and lead people away from him.

Reformation Sunday is a day we remember that there was a time when that deception had become so pervasive that the Gospel truth itself had almost disappeared from the world. In the late medieval church, guilty and fearful sinners were not pointed to the cross of Jesus Christ but ultimately to themselves--their own works of penance, prayers, monastic vows, or even to worthless certificates of indulgences that were sold promising to remove the penalty for sin. Reformation is a day to celebrate how God acted through Martin Luther to restore the Bible as the source of truth and to restore the Bible's message of grace and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ alone, so that guilty and terrified consciences could have sure hope in Christ instead of that fearful uncertainty and dread.

But the danger Jesus warned about has not passed; in fact the number of false messages spoken in the church and in Jesus name has only multiplied in our own age. Self-styled prophets who point people to their own supposed revelations rather than the Bible. Churches who put the focus away from the cross and eternal salvation but on political activism. Or churches that put the emphasis on your own charismatic gifts as the real reason why you can trust that you will be saved.

Don't be scared. But be prepared. And we become prepared by studying God's Word--hearing it taught here in worship and in Bible study and through your own personal study of God's Word. It was Martin Luther who translated the Bible into the common language of the people. We honor his heritage by reading and learning his Word regularly!

II. Prepared for end time disasters

But there's more we need to be prepared for. ***When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.***

...and as any mother knows, birth pains tend to get worse, not lighter, leading up to delivery. Jesus helps us be prepared by telling us what to expect. Nuclear arms races, terrorism, category 5 hurricanes and economic collapses--none of this means that the world is outside of God's control. These things are God's warning that the world is heading for its end.

Unlike so many people in the modern world, we are not expecting or waiting for the day that science and technology will turn the world into a great utopia, a paradise on earth. We

know that the problems caused by sin are beyond mankind's ability to solve. Only Jesus could do that, with his death on the cross. So when we see earthly problems, even growing problems, for us it doesn't mean the end of our hopes. It means that the things Jesus said would happen are coming true. And it means that we are all the more ready for the end of history, the coming of Jesus and the beginning of eternity. Prepared, not scared!

III. Prepared to testify publicly

But before that great day comes, Jesus says, you need to be prepared for one more thing: prepared to testify publicly about me when you are put to the test.

You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Certainly Jesus' words have already been fulfilled many times in the past. We see all of these things happen during the mission work of Paul as recorded in the book of Acts. We see it fulfilled again in the story of Martin Luther, a copper miner's son and small-town professor who, for daring to suggest that the church should stop selling forgiveness of sins on certificates and instead should teach the grace of God in Christ, was hauled before cardinals and emperors and ordered to take back his words, without any debate or discussion, or be prepared to give up his life. Luther's reply has come down through the ages:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other.

Jesus kept his promise. The Holy Spirit gave Luther words to say. He was willing to take his stand on Scripture regardless of the consequences to himself.

But the need for faithful testifying has not ended. We pray for all those Christians who are called upon to depend their faith publicly in front of hostile powers. We pray that God would keep their faith from crumbling and that he would give them wisdom to speak the truth as boldly and selflessly as Luther did.

And Jesus says we all need to be on our guard. We all need to be prepared to suffer. We all need to be prepared to testify. Peter says in his letter, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15) Prepared, but not scared—because you have Jesus' promise that he will be with you. But be prepared by hearing God's Word and receiving his

sacrament, so that the Holy Spirit can strengthen you to be ready for a time when you have to say what you believe and why.

Conclusion

Sandwiched in between Jesus' warnings and calls to be prepared was a wonderful promise that we might overlook: ***"And the Gospel must first be preached to all nations."***

501 years ago the Gospel was hardly being preached in any nations. It had been covered up by false traditions. The church had become just another political institution in medieval Europe, eager for land and power. People put their trust in the saints and Mary instead of in Christ. Holiness was found in monastic vows rather than his cross. The Bible was trapped in a language of scholars and people were told that it was far too complicated for them to read or understand. Even the sacrament of communion was turned into a work of man, and was bought and sold like some sort of commodity.

But Jesus was determined that before this world's clock ran out, his true Gospel would be preached to all nations, just as he had promised it would. And so just before that time in history when explorers from Europe began reaching out to all corners of the globe, God saw to it that his Gospel was found and preached again, by Luther and many others; and in large part that is why you and I are here today in a church called by his name.

Thanks to that Gospel, you are prepared--for whatever Jesus allows to happen before the end. Don't be scared, but be on your guard--prepared to confess Jesus on earth, to suffer for him if need be, and to see him appear in glory--trusting in his grace alone! Amen.