

The Day Is Surely Drawing Near

Luke 21:5-28

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 13, 2016 – Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. As we approach the end of the Church Year, it is most appropriate for God’s people to loudly sing of how “The Day Is Surely Drawing Near.” But which day is that? It’s that Day when Christ will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead. But because no one really knows the day or hour of Christ’s return, how then shall we live as His people? Well, that’s precisely what Jesus is talking about in this morning’s Gospel. He’s preparing us for life as His Church – living as we must in a hostile world filled with sin, conflict and distress.

Our Savior is laying out for us the conditions that characterize this age so that we might know what we’re in for – so that we might be able to forge ahead with eyes open, ears trained, mouths ready to confess, and heads raised. The confusing part, however, is that our Lord is talking about two entirely different days – first, the day in which the Temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed – an event which happened sometime around the year 70 AD – and secondly the destruction and end of the world as we know it – which, of course, has yet to happen. Now of course the things Christ predicted about the Temple and Jerusalem *did* take place. And just as Jesus predicted, it was a time of great terror. It was safer to flee Jerusalem rather than to take refuge within her walls, because once the Roman armies began to sweep over the land it wasn’t long before no stone was left upon another. As the Roman soldiers brought their swords down upon the people of Jerusalem, blood flowed in the streets as God brought Divine judgment upon that ancient city and people which had rejected the One whom God had sent to save them.

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples to prepare them for the conditions they would have to face over the next 40 years – so they wouldn’t be caught off guard when all these things came to pass. Jesus told them to prepare themselves, to be ready to endure what would inevitably come. They were not to think God had forgotten them, and they were to remember that He would strengthen them to stand firm to the end. But what does this have to do with us? Well, just as Jesus prepared His first-century followers for the destruction that was coming, at the same time He was also preparing us for the end – for what we would have to face in our own age and time. The conditions, you see, are par-

allel. The distress which characterized the years leading up to AD 70 also characterize our own stress-filled age – complete with religious deception, wars, disaster, and persecution. The Church still faces these things in our time, and always will, right up until the Day when Christ returns.

Meanwhile, we need to know that our Savior is with us to strengthen us and cause us to stand firm. And what Jesus instructs us to do, He will also enable us to accomplish. It is Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, our only Savior, who died on the cross and took upon Himself the Divine judgment you and I deserve by reason of our sin. It is Christ who won our forgiveness. It is Christ who will come to gather us home and grace us with the gift of everlasting life. And it is this same Jesus speaking to you now with the very same words He spoke to His disciples of old: “Train your eyes and ears, open your mouth, and raise Your heads.”

As you train your eyes and ears you must not be deceived by what you see and hear. Look at this text. The disciples were impressed by everything they saw around them – oohing and aahing over the beauty of the Temple – how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings. But Jesus cautioned them that the days were coming when there would not be left one stone upon another that would not be thrown down. What is impressive to the eyes of man is nothing in the sight of God. What makes an impact on us doesn’t necessarily do anything for God. So you are not to be deceived by what you see. Are there not a great many big, impressive Churches all around us sporting huge buildings, a large paid staff, state-of-the-art lighting and sound, complete with words and videos projected on screens to delight the eye? These churches are pulling in the crowds! But, Jesus tells us, we are not to judge by what we see with our eyes.

Is Christ crucified for sin faithfully preached? Is there a proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins going on? Is the message of the cross, and the Gospel of Christ as our only Savior, at the center of everything? Or are people hearing instead self-help messages about how to feel good about one’s self, or how-to advice and “Christian” success formulas to improve one’s life? Jesus says: “Do not go after them.” It would be better to be in a little rundown building with few members where you hear the Gospel of Christ

preached and the Sacraments are administered in their truth and purity than to be lulled to sleep in the cushy pews of a fabulous megachurch with thousands of people, but no Gospel.

Hear the word of God, dear Christian, that on your own you are a lost, condemned sinner – and that all the self-help books in the world, piled up to the highest heavens, cannot help you in the slightest. You cannot ever hope to become a “better-enough you” to please God. You have to recognize the sin which lurks in all our hearts, the apathy we all feel toward the things of God, the grudges we bear against our brothers and sisters, the “self” we all love to worship and want others to applaud. That is who we are on our own, and that’s a very dangerous place to be.

But now hear how God has had mercy on you and on this whole world of no-goodniks –how He sent his Son, Jesus, to be your Savior! Hear how Jesus loves you so much that He died for you, shed His holy blood for you – and all so that you might not die under God’s judgment. Look at His cross! See there your Savior – a beautiful sight for sore eyes – Christ crucified for you! You have been spared. You have been saved. Christ did it all in your place. He even rose from the dead for you – to show you that you have life, eternal life, in His name. And hear also how He is coming again, to gather to Himself all those who belong to Him. This is Good News! This is the Savior God desires you to behold with the eyes of faith! You must not allow yourself to be misled or settle for anything less!

Next, after you’ve trained your eyes and ears, you are to open your mouth, remembering how Jesus reminds us how we will be brought before kings and governors for His name’s sake. But this, Jesus says, will be your opportunity to bear witness. There will be times of persecution for Jesus’ disciples. But rather than seeing this as a problem, Jesus calls it an opportunity! Rather than keeping silent to avoid trouble, Jesus encourages you to open your mouth and speak, knowing that He will give you a mouth and the wisdom to use it! It’s true, you may not face the kind of intense persecution the Apostles faced, but you will find yourself in places where you will have occasion to speak of and confess our Savior before men. The Word of God you’ve heard and learned here, that Word which you have taken into your ears and heart, when God gives you the opportunity, your mouth will speak it to others. Christ will use you to speak the truth of His holy, blessed Word over against every error of this world. He will use you to speak the Good News to your neighbor – to open your mouth and invite your unchurched friend, or that fellow member you haven’t seen in a while, to come once more to listen to and learn of Jesus.

Then after you’ve trained your eyes and ears and opened your mouth, you are to raise your head, knowing that your redemption is drawing near. Christ *is* coming back – coming back to straighten out this mess! You must not lose heart or sink into despair, but you are to raise your head and look up with anticipation. The world will not continue on this crazy course forever. There is coming a Day when all the deceivers, wars, disasters, and persecution will come to an end. A Day is coming when the suffering, death and sin we see all around and within us will all be set right. That Day *is* coming, dear friends! “Heaven and earth will pass away, but” Jesus’ “words will not pass away.”

This is the Church’s great hope then – the return of Her Savior! Christ would have us all look forward to that day, looking up and raising our heads in expectation. And oh, what a great and glorious Day that will be! It has not even entered into the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who belong to Him – that Day when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come on the clouds of glory to “finalize” your redemption. Most certainly our Lord Christ has already redeemed and set you free from sin and death by his holy precious blood shed on Calvary’s cross. And while we may have a foretaste of that even in our own day, the end result of Christ’s work will only fully be realized on that Day when our Redeemer returns and gives you a glorified body, free from sorrow and pain, and perfect communion with our Lord and all His saints, as together you join in worship around the throne of the Lamb. Imagine the heavenly banquet, the feast of salvation, life, eternal life, and being at home with God forever. This is what still lies before us!

In the meantime, in these end times, you must do what our Savior has given you to do. You must train your eyes and ears not to be fooled by mere appearances, but to look and listen for what God values: the truth of the Gospel and the blessings of the Sacraments – rightly taught, preached and administered. So open your mouth to confess Christ before men. This is your opportunity to bear witness as Jesus gives you a mouth and the wisdom to use it. And finally, raise your heads, and look forward to the Last Day – the beginning of “the life of the world to come.” Look up in hope, for you have a hope you can count on. Christ is coming again! That day is surely drawing near! Straighten your weary back and drooping shoulders and raise your head, because your redemption is drawing near! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.