

Pastor T.C. Arnold
25th Sunday after Trinity
Matthew 24:15-16
November 13th, 2016

Jesus said, “*So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*”

Sounds like Jesus is preparing us for the end of the world. Sounds like this is the perfect text after the ugliest presidential campaign in memory which brought open vulgarities, vices and absolute atrocities out in the open – even when previous generations kept such things under wraps. Sounds like the perfect text for the Christian who may be concerned about what will happen to our country now. Sounds like the perfect text – because this election between two of the most unpopular candidates in the history of our country, because our anxiety levels may be increased and the future is more of an “unknown” now than ever before, because the Cubs actually won the World Series, this perfect text is telling you, “get right with the Lord, my friends, the latter days are at hand.” Or, as Jesus says, “*let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains...*” but I say, and I’m not correcting Jesus on this, don’t flee quite yet. There’s more.

Part of the “more” begins for us with a bit of a history lesson. Jesus quotes the prophet Daniel at the beginning of this text this morning. He says, “*Let the reader understand*” because Jesus is bringing understanding to these words. Daniel speaks in chapters 11 and 12 in the book that bears his name about the desolation of the Temple – and that happened. You see, about 150 years before Jesus was born a man named Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple of the Lord by erecting a pagan altar on top of the great altar of burnt sacrifice in the Holy and the Holy of Holies. And now Jesus points the people forward to a time when they will have to flee for their lives. This will be at the destruction of the Temple which would happen about 40 or so years after Jesus spoke these words. The Idumeans (residence of Edom) ran-sacked the Temple and deluged it with the blood of 8,500 victims. The famous historian Josephus recounts in his historical narrative, “These men, therefore trampled upon all the laws of men and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers...”

And today, we see politicians who seem to be doing the same thing... trampling the laws of men and laughing at the laws of God. So, this is it, right? The end is near, right? Repent, oh people of God, repent! “*Turn to the Lord and flee for the mountains.*” But I say again, don’t flee quite yet.

I don’t know if you are anxious or relieved. I don’t know if you are worried. I’m not even sure of all the reasons fear seizes your heart at this moment. Perhaps you are worried about our country’s direction. Perhaps you are concerned of what our future holds. But maybe today, you are worried about your children... because of other reasons that have to do with their future. Maybe you worry about the school they attend or the friends they have. You worry because they don’t fit in – or – they are fitting in too well (let the hearer understand). Maybe you are concerned about your mother, her health, her happiness in a care facility, her financial situation. And I could be describing any one of us right now, but mostly I’m describing myself.

The point is, there are any number of things that are causing our hearts to drop – causing concern and fear. It’s easy to look up and wonder if the sky is falling – or – get a crick in our neck because in these gray and latter days, we are looking for our Lord. It’s easy because there is much to fear. But fret not, beloved in the Lord. Our Heavenly Father is in charge as much today as He was the last time we gathered in the place. So, don’t flee for the mountains quite yet.

Rejoice, beloved in the Lord. Sing His praises and give thanks. God is still God. He is the same today, yesterday and forever. Turn to the Lord... and stay right here. I say that in all seriousness. Here are three reasons why:

First, your leaders need your prayers. Pray that they make God-pleasing decisions for the sake of our Lord. Today, our country needs the prayers of its citizens more than ever. Pray for our world's leaders as well. Pray for wisdom to do and say what is good for the sake of the people. Pray and keep on praying. Never forget, your Lord hears every single one of our prayers.

Secondly, your friends and neighbors need Christians to speak the truth in love to them. Some of our neighbors don't know who Jesus is. Some of them have gone wayward and strayed from the Word of God and are caught up in evil and sinful acts. Your friends and neighbors could use your encouragement, your message of hope, a listening ear, or even a shoulder to cry on. Your neighbor may need to hear the word of law for the sake of correction but then also the salve of the Gospel to remind them that Jesus loves and died for them as well. Your friends, neighbors and relatives needs messengers like you.

And finally, don't flee to the mountains, because you need Jesus. And beloved, that's what we get right here. In this place God's people gather to receive His free gifts of the forgiveness of sins. This is the place where sinners like you and me are wrapped in the love of Jesus as He comes to those with fear in their hearts and worries on their lips. Jesus comes to you, here, in this place, to give us what we need, what is promised, what we can count on – even if we don't think we can count on much else.

So, *“let the reader understand,”* as Jesus would say, these words from God's Word... from the lips of our Savior Himself, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* Or, these words from St. Paul in Ephesians chapter two, *“Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing line of hostility... And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”*

So, you might be saying to yourself, “pastor, you say don't flee to the mountains and Jesus says in the text, flee to the mountains. What gives? Are you telling us to do something different than Jesus?” The answer is, “no.” For those of Judea, the day of destruction was upon them. On that day they took Jesus at His word and got out of Dodge – they fled to the mountains. That day of judgement will one day come. But, in the meantime, we work. We live. We love. We pray. We share His peace right where we are. We dare not give that up. We repent and we turn to the Lord. And you, the church, keeps on doing what we have always done – through good times and bad – we live in the presence of God as He feeds us so that we can take heed the words of Moses in his final blessing to the people of God: *“So as your days are, so shall your strength be.”* You see, that's God's promise for you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.