

November 13, 2022
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 21:5-28 (Malachi 4:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 21st chapter, with particular focus on verse 28 where Jesus says:

"28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28)

As the Church Year draws to a close, our appointed Scripture lessons direct our attention to the end of the world as we know it. Call that day what you want: the Day of the Lord, the Last Day, the Second Coming, or Judgment Day. The day is surely drawing near when Jesus, God's Anointed, will return with power and great glory. Flames on flames shall ravage earth as Scripture has long warned us. (cf: LSB 508 The Day Is Surely Drawing Near, stz. 1) Through His prophet Malachi the Lord God says:

"... the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1)

Jesus warns that:

"... 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." (Luke 21:25-26)

Before you panic and go screaming into the streets remember that our Lord promises never to leave you nor forsake you. He is your rock, your fortress, your deliverer, and your salvation in whom you take refuge. (cf: Psalm 18:2) It is instructive that in our Gospel text, that Jesus does not say that after God's righteous judgement He will come along and pick up the pieces. No. He gives His Word of promise of deliverance and salvation in the midst of your suffering and tribulation. We will hear more on that in a minute.

Jesus is leaving the temple in Jerusalem with His disciples after a long day of teaching and debating the scribes and Pharisees. (Matthew 21:23 – 24:1) He has been confronted by the religious leaders, questioned, tested, and plotted against. In less than three days He will be savagely tortured and crucified on Calvary's cross to win your salvation. As they leave the

temple the some of the disciples speak of the of beauty of the temple, the magnificent stones and valuable offerings that adorned it. (cf: Luke 21:5) But Jesus tells them:

“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Luke 21:6)

Jesus prepares His disciples for the hard times ahead, for things that no one would have conceived possible. The siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD was the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophesy. Many of Jesus’ disciples would see the day when not one stone of the temple would be left upon another but thrown down.

Our text is not merely a history lesson. The destruction of Jerusalem is merely a foreshadowing of what will come in the days leading up to our Lord’s return on the Last Day – and we are in those final days right now. Jesus is preparing you, brothers and sisters in Christ, for the tribulation that is to come.

As Lutheran Christians we believe, teach, and confess that the end times began with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. After this beginning of the end, God’s grace and forgiveness no longer comes through animal sacrifices at a manmade stone temple. His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation now come through what the Lord Himself has instituted: the preaching of the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus gives us concrete warning signs that indicate that the Last Day is surely drawing near. The fall of Jerusalem has already happened. Today there are false Messiahs, those who come in the name of Jesus, but are intent on leading believers astray. There are wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, famines and pestilences, governmental persecution of believers, division among family members because of faith in Christ, and in some countries the betrayal of family and martyrdom. (cf: Luke 21:8–24) There seems to never be a moment when there is nothing to be anxious about.

Notice that Jesus does not offer to spare His disciples from persecution and tribulation. Even as the devil is working overtime to draw you away from faith in Jesus. In His divine wisdom, He gives no promise of a rapture or quick and easy escape. You will face hard times. Some harder than others. Some of you are facing them right now. But right in the middle of the suffering and tribulation Jesus gives you His Word. For all who fear, love, and trust in God above all things, you have God’s promise that for the sake of Christ Jesus, that He will provide for you in your tribulation. He did it for His disciples 2,000 years ago and He will do the same for you. In your tribulation hold fast to Jesus words. He says:

“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... 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.” (Luke 21:13–15, 17-19)

Speaking through His prophet Malachi, the Lord God says:

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”

(Malachi 4:2)

If you have never witnessed calves leaping from the stall for the first time, I suggest you look it up on YouTube. It is a picture of unrestrained joy. Rather than facing the fire of God’s wrath and being trampled underfoot, all who believe in Christ Jesus will find healing in the righteousness of Christ. You will be filled with the unspeakable joy of your salvation.

Malachi also prophesies that God will send Elijah, the Old Testament preacher of repentance. But Malachi is speaking of the greater Elijah, John the Baptist, the great preacher of repentance who prepared the way of the Lord, Jesus. And today, God continues to work through His under-shepherds, pastors, to call His people to repentance, announcing the Absolution, proclaiming the purity of the Gospel, and administering Christ’s Sacraments according to His institution.

The day is surely drawing near when Jesus, God’s Anointed, will return with power and great glory. Until His return, repent and cling to the Gospel. Flee from all your unrighteousness and abide in the One who died for your sins. Do not be deceived – but take the destruction and judgment on the Last Day very seriously. Yet, do not become captivated like those who’ve become obsessed with the End Times and trying to predict the Last Day. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

“... do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34)

Today not only has enough trouble, but it has also enough good works and deeds for you to perform. Not that they count toward your salvation, but because God has created them in advance for you to do. In our Epistle text, St Paul was warning the Thessalonians about this. (cf: 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13) Since they had been taught Jesus was coming soon, they neglected their daily responsibilities and jobs. This gave them lots of time on their hands, so they spent their time sticking their noses into other people’s business, gossiping, and depending upon the support of others. Calling them to repentance, Paul encouraged them and all believers:

“... to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.” (2 Thessalonians 3:12–13)

There is a lot of good for you to do before Jesus comes again. We do not know if He will return tomorrow, next week, next year, or in a thousand years. So, in the meantime, do what the Lord has given you to do. That is, carry out whatever vocation you have and do the good work He provides for you. What is your vocation? Are you a husband, wife, father, mother, worker, church member, citizen? Love and serve those you come into contact with – just as God loves and serves you in Christ Jesus. This is the good work God has given you. Go and love and serve as if you were loving and serving Jesus face to face every day. Pray that God give you the wisdom and the strength do these good works – and – make a good confession of the hope you have in Christ Jesus. (cf: 1 Peter 3:15)

We look around the world and see nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, natural disasters and all sorts of tribulation. Our own country appears to be falling to pieces before our very eyes. Yet, hear the words of Jesus:

“See that you are not led astray... do not be terrified, for these things must first take place...” (Luke 21:8–9)

It is a divine necessity. These things must take place. Then He continues saying:

“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28)

Christ crucified and risen from the dead is coming again to redeem you – that is – He is coming to take you away from the temptations of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. The great day of salvation is coming for all those who trust in Christ Jesus. He has won victory over sin, death, and the grave. He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, from where He will judge the righteous and the unrighteous. The Last Day is a great and glorious day because the Judge who is to come is also your Savior. He is the one who died on the cross, taking your judgement upon Himself, paying the full wages of your sin. If He has done all that for you in advance, He will certainly never leave you nor forsake you.

Jesus did not only die for you. He also rose for you. His resurrection demonstrates His power over death and assures you that God accepted His sacrificial death on your behalf. It is His promise of your bodily resurrection into eternal life on the Last Day. He will rescue you from the final destruction coming upon this world and will lead you into the age to come, where there will be a restored creation with all God’s redeemed at the feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom.

You have Jesus’ Word. This is your hope, the very thing you cling to during good times and bad. The day of the Lord is coming. Do not be like pagans, who have reason to fear. The end of the world is not a reason for fear, but a reason to stand tall and look up into the heavens, because eternal life in the presence of your Savior is about to begin. Christ is returning to bring the glory of His eternal kingdom and take you home with Him and all the saints who have gone before. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.