

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

November 14, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Scripture Readings

Daniel 12:1-3

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 13:1-13

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For

nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Hymn: *LSB 508, The Day is Surely Drawing Near*



1 The day is sure - ly draw - ing near When Je - sus, God's a - noint - ed,
2 The fi - nal trum - pet then shall sound And all the earth be shak - en,
3 The books are o - pened then to all, A rec - ord tru - ly tell - ing
4 Then woe to those who scorned the Lord And sought but car - nal plea - sures,



In all His pow - er shall ap - pear As judge whom God ap -
And all who rest be - neath the ground Shall from their sleep a -
What each has done, both great and small, When he on earth was
Who here de - spised His pre - cious Word And loved their earth - ly



point - ed. Then fright shall ban - ish i - dle mirth, And flames on
wak - en. But all who live will in that hour, By God's al -
dwell - ing, And ev - 'ry heart be clear - ly seen, And all be
trea - sures! With shame and trem - bling they will stand And at the



flames shall rav - age earth As Scrip - ture long has warned us.
might - y, bound - less pow'r, Be changed at His com - mand - ing.
known as they have been In thoughts and words and ac - tions.
judg - e's stern com - mand To Sa - tan be de - liv - ered.

5 My Savior paid the debt I owe
And for my sin was smitten;
Within the Book of Life I know
My name has now been written.
I will not doubt, for I am free,
And Satan cannot threaten me;
There is no condemnation!

6 May Christ our intercessor be
And through His blood and merit
Read from His book that we are free
With all who life inherit.
Then we shall see Him face to face,
With all His saints in that blest place

Which He has purchased for us.

7 O Jesus Christ, do not delay,
But hasten our salvation;
We often tremble on our way
In fear and tribulation.
O hear and grant our fervent plea:
Come, mighty judge, and set us free
From death and ev'ry evil.

Sermon

These last couple of weeks of the church's year are devoted towards a forward-looking theme: the end of the church year is placed in parallel with the end of the world as we know it. I don't want to say "the end of the world," but simply the world as we know it, because when Christ returns it's not as if there will be no more earth. There will be a renewed earth, a renovated, repaired, re-created earth, but it won't be very much like what we are experiencing right now. And this end of the year takes our minds to that end of time.

Advent also reminds us of the Lord's second coming; we move towards Christmas in that Advent season of waiting, learning to prepare for the second coming in glory by reflecting on the first one in Bethlehem. But this part of the year is different: Advent is about the Church waiting patiently, while these "end times" Sundays are a warning before it's too late.

We're not big on the "fire and brimstone" kind of sermon in the Lutheran church. Part of it is that we always want to stress the Gospel and the gifts of God much more than the Law. Part of it is the audience: you who are coming to church are the ones who need to hear those words intended for the faithful people, the words of absolution and grace and promise.

We don't need to talk so much about the wrath of God here during Sunday worship, because this worship together is primary for God's people, for them to receive His gifts, to return thanks and praise, and to enjoy fellowship as the Body of Christ. It's fine and it's wonderful for non-believers to come on Sunday, to hear the Gospel and see what the Church is, but it's for the Christians. And there is no wrath of God for those who have been reconciled with Him in Christ.

But since that's not what this is about, it's easy to forget that there is wrath and punishment against unbelief, sin, and wickedness. Today's passage from 2 Thessalonians offers some fire and brimstone, some warnings about divine justice and wrath: "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints."

There's a warning there, to be sure: there is punishment and vengeance against those who do not know and follow God. There is justice for all the evil done, especially evil done against those who do believe. Of course, there's always a temptation for Christians to act like the rest of the world instead of acting like Jesus; when we find ourselves afflicted like Paul says, there's a temptation to stoop down to the world's level and fight back. Jesus is crystal clear, that's not the right response - we are called to sit back, wait patiently and if necessary suffer patiently, and let God take care of bringing justice, when and how He sees fit.

It's not up to us to make the justice and punishment happen, but it is right for us to warn about what will come. This text tells us when it will happen: "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire." That is, on the Last Day when Jesus returns. It is,

perhaps, a comfort for us. When we look around at the world and see all the injustice and evil, when people do terrible things and seem to face no consequences, when it seems like those who oppose the Christian faith have the upper hand, when the Gospel message of Christ itself is muddied and twisted for profit by false teachers; when we see all of it, we can remember that God is full of grace and mercy but also full of justice and holiness that cannot coexist alongside such evil. He is going to set it all right, when and how He sees fit.

When we follow the words of Jesus and do not resist evildoers, when we turn the other cheek, when we love our enemies, we do it with this in mind: it is not as if God doesn't care about evil or will let it all slide. It's not like God is simply ignoring the suffering of those who believe. Rather, we are told to not get in the way of God and the ways that He will use for this wrath and punishment, because His plans are better than ours. The Beatitudes that we heard last week mentioned those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" - those who have a desire for justice will be filled and satisfied in that. Justice and righteous punishment for evil is Godly; but at the same time, it comes from God and not from us.

It is a serious warning. For us, it is a reminder that we too deserve the same thing, and we escape it only by the grace and mercy of God. We are no better than anyone else, no better than the most notorious and wicked, because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. The only difference lies in receiving God's gifts in Christ, being molded by the Holy Spirit in imitating Christ, being declared righteous and reconciled with God through Christ. "There but for the grace of God go I," you've heard; so when we are reminded of the reality of hell and wrath, this "eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord," it's a reminder of what we are spared. Even these many years, the centuries that have passed, are a part of that mercy - we are given more time and more opportunities to repent and believe.

Another preacher long ago put it like this: "Just because God doesn't punish everyone here, don't doubt things to come. For God is merciful and patient. That is why he issues warnings and doesn't immediately cast us into hell. For 'I don't desire,' he says, 'the death of a sinner.' These words have no meaning, however, if sinners never die... For to remember hell prevents our own falling into hell."

It's also a reminder of why evangelism and outreach are important. It is a serious warning to those who oppose and persecute the Church, who reject the gifts of God and mock Christ, who pursue evil and their own selfish gain, who see God and religion as unimportant or having nothing to do with their lives. We may certainly pray that evil and harmful plans are not carried out, and we can be comforted by the future justice for all the wrongs that we suffer as Christians, but we also remember that other human beings are not our enemies and we ought to desire not their punishment but their conversion; not to suffer for their sins, but to repent and believe. The Christian way of eliminating an enemy is for him to become a brother in Christ. This fire and brimstone in 2 Thessalonians is a sober warning, but it's also a warning that it's not too late. Until that Last Day when this return of Christ with angels and flaming fire happens, until then it is never too late.

There was a pastor who was imprisoned by a hostile Communist regime simply for being a Christian pastor, and he wrote this warning and plea to his Communist oppressors which fits well with this 2 Thessalonians text: "Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ... And so, [government officials], stop committing evil. This is not for my benefit but rather for yours and your children's. I plead earnestly with you to stay your hands, for why should you be willing to pay the price of eternal condemnation in hell for the sake of a lowly sinner such as I?"

But let's not forget the first lines of this passage, too. Let's not forget the joy and thankfulness to God even while all of that is happening. Paul writes, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you

for one another is increasing." He reminds us that enduring afflictions increases our faith, and when our faith grows our brotherly love and good works of compassion also increase.

He goes on, "To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." May God indeed fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith! He calls us light of the world, and tells us not to hide that light; he calls us to shine that light, to love our neighbors, to endure in faith, and to warn those who do not believe about the condemnation that will come while there is still time to escape it.

This church's newsletter is called "the Watchman," and this name goes back to a pastor here in 1908. He was thinking of the prophetic image in Ezekiel of a watchman, a sentry up on the city wall who ought to warn the people of an oncoming threat or enemy. We are like that watchman, too - warning people of God's future judgment. We speak Law to remind all people of their Creator and His intentions for humanity, but it is the Gospel that produces true hope and changed lives. The call to repent is always followed by the invitation of Christ, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest". The task of watchman would be thankless and fruitless if the only message was God's wrath. We share far more than that: His care and mercy for all who turn to Him in faith.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: O Lord, by Your bountiful goodness release us from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our weakness we have brought upon ourselves, that we may stand firm until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.