

The Last Sunday of the Church Year (the Feast of Christ the King)

November 21, 2021

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

C: **Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Nahum 1:15-2:2

Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him
who brings good news,
who publishes peace!
Keep your feasts, O Judah;
fulfill your vows,
for never again shall the worthless pass through you;
he is utterly cut off.

The scatterer has come up against you.

Man the ramparts;
watch the road;
dress for battle;
collect all your strength.

For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob
as the majesty of Israel,
for plunderers have plundered them
and ruined their branches.

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

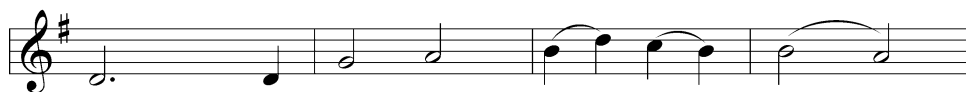
“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Hymn: *LSB 336, Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending*



1 Lo! He comes with clouds de - scend - ing,
 2 Ev - 'ry eye shall now be - hold Him
 3 Those dear to - kens of His pas - sion
 4 Yea, a - men, let all a - dore Thee,



Once for ev - 'ry sin - ner slain;
 Robed in glo - rious maj - es - ty;
 Still His daz - zling bod - y bears,
 High on Thine e - ter - nal throne;



Thou - sand thou - sand saints at - tend - ing
 Those who set at naught and sold Him,
 Cause of end - less ex - ul - ta - tion
 Sav - ior, take the pow'r and glo - ry,



Swell the tri - umph of His train:
 Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
 To His ran - somed wor - ship - ers.
 Claim the king - dom as Thine own.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le -
 Deep - ly wail - ing, deep - ly wail - ing, deep - ly
 With what rap - ture, with what rap - ture, with what
 Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le -



lu - ia! Christ the Lord re - turns to reign.
 wail - ing, Shall their true Mes - si - ah see.
 rap - ture Gaze we on those glo - rious scars!
 lu - ia! Thou shalt reign, and Thou a - lone!

Sermon

“Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace!” That’s how today’s passage from the Old Testament prophet Nahum begins, but it makes me think of a story from another ancient civilization, a Greek man named Pheidippides. You may not recognize that name, but you certainly know the event he’s famous for: the marathon. After the Greek army defeated the Persians at a place called Marathon, he ran the 26 or so miles back to Athens carrying news of that victory. He came down the mountains, shouting “Joy! We won!” - upon the mountains, the feet of a herald bringing good news.

Nahum lived and wrote centuries before Marathon happened, but that is the kind of image he has in mind: the messenger who brings good news of great joy, who brings the news of a major victory. That comparison of battle and warfare is a good one, because Nahum’s writing is full of that too. He is speaking in the 600s BC, against the Assyrians who had done so many terrible things across the Middle East, including to the Israelites. The Assyrians were some of the most dangerous and violent people in a dangerous and violent world, aggressive and militaristic and harsh in a way the world had rarely seen before.

What Nahum sees is the decline and fall of Assyria, those who had thought they were unbeatable in their wealth, their power, and their military facing complete and total destruction. The powers of the earth rise and fall, but the power of God is forever: in Nahum’s writing, God is a mighty warrior who protects His people and defeats His people’s enemies. His writing is some of the most vivid, graphic, dramatic poetry in the whole Bible, and the point of it all is this: “the Lord is avenging and wrathful on his enemies... [But] the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble [for] those who take refuge in him.”

The news of Nahum’s marathon run is the fall and ruin of their Assyrian enemies. The threat is gone! The enemy is defeated! Don’t be afraid; rejoice and be glad! God’s punishment has been poured out, and you who are faithful have been saved. It makes me think of the Flood and Noah’s ark: those who are inside the ark are safe and sound by God’s grace -- but you sure don’t want to be outside of the ark, in that storm and flood, death and disaster!

Terrible things have happened to God’s people, Nahum remembers. And God let it all happen as His punishment for their own unfaithfulness and sin. But the Lord does not forget His promises; even when we are faithless, He remains faithful. And so, He is restoring Israel. He’s not done with them yet -- time after time, they rebel and fall away from the God who saves them, and time after time He punishes, yet always preserves a remnant or a portion of the people to continue His work.

When Nahum lived, God was not done with His people in Israel because it was from them that He had planned and promised to bring the Messiah as a Savior not only for them but for all of us. Even when Nahum lived, the prophets spoke about faithful people coming from all nations, believing Gentiles who worship the God of Israel and are counted among His people. Even then, the prophets pointed to a salvation open for all humanity, that the true people of God are defined by faith and not by bloodline. As Nahum lived, God was not done with Israel and so He promised that good news was on the way.

The same is true today. You are God’s people, and too often you also suffer in the middle of this world’s dangers and tragedies. Maybe it’s not the Assyrians breaking down your door to pillage and murder, but this world is still a hazardous and broken place. And still, like the ancient Israelites, God is not done with you, His faithful people. There is good news on the way. There are messengers who publish peace.

If this verse from Nahum sounds a bit familiar to you, it’s because it is quoted by Paul in the book of Romans. He writes this: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are

they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

The good news of God, the Gospel, is not just what Nahum has to say about the Assyrians getting what they deserved. It is not just about ancient Israelites breathing a little easier in their socio-political environment. It is not just an object lesson about everyone who opposes God and does evil and violence. It is a foretaste of the Gospel of Jesus, a reminder of God's work across many centuries and through many people to finally bring salvation for people in every nation and language and place.

That's the picture of anyone who shares the Gospel: the messenger, the courier bounding down the mountainside shouting the news "Rejoice! Victory!" The fall of Assyria points us to the defeat of Satan and all the forces of evil; judgment against Nineveh is a glimpse of the judgment against all evil everywhere. The defeat of evil means the victory of good, on behalf of those who are on the side of God. The defeat of evil means salvation, and this is what the Gospel is all about: death and hell, sin and the devil, have all been crushed under the cross of Jesus.

We do not win the victory; we do not contribute to that salvation. We are not warriors or soldiers in this fight. Jesus is the one who wins the victory, and we are simply the messengers who share the good news of what has happened. Our enemies have been crushed under the cross, and it is (as Jesus himself says on the cross), "it is finished."

We often talk, with good solid Biblical basis, about being witnesses. Jesus sends out his apostles as witnesses to tell people about himself and all that he has done. But that word "witness" makes me think of something legal: the police questioned witnesses to the crime to figure out what happened, or the witnesses are called to testify in court. So that word brings to my mind situations that are cold and formal, or tense and dramatic. What I don't typically connect the word "witness" with in my mind is joy. That's where Nahum and Paul's words are powerful: our Christian witness about Jesus is not just establishing the facts of the case, but shouting for joy at the victory.

The mighty have fallen, and the mighty will fall. At Marathon, the Athenians faced the massive Persian empire. The Israelites faced the massive Assyrian empire. We are faced with the might of Satan -- as the hymn "A Mighty Fortress" puts it, "on earth he has no equal; no strength of ours can match his might." But God steps in as the mighty warrior that Nahum pictures and He wins the battle for us. "How the mighty have fallen!" It is the meek who will inherit the earth, those who are humble and powerless, those who trust God and not themselves. That might be how we feel in spiritual terms: outnumbered, outgunned, outmaneuvered by those who oppose the Gospel message or Christian people.

But our conviction is not just that Christ will win in the end, but that he has already won! There are stories of Japanese soldiers on remote Pacific islands who continued holding out for years or even decades after the Second World War had ended, and no matter how outnumbered, outgunned, outmaneuvered we may feel at times, that is the real state of our enemies. They are hopelessly holding out when the war has already been won! There is no doubt about the outcome because, even if the evil in the world refuses to acknowledge that the war is over, the victory of Jesus has already happened. Satan has been defeated. Sinners have been reconciled. Death is no more; the biological form remains for a time, but our eternal life with God is already established. 1 Corinthians 15 says that death has been swallowed up in victory, and the sting of it is gone, washed away by faith. The victory is won and the victory is here, even if there are these holdouts that keep struggling against God long after the peace treaty has been signed with the blood of Jesus.

So we too run to bring good news and to publish peace. We bring the good news that Jesus of Nazareth is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that he has taken on death and the devil and beaten them, that we now have peace. We have a peace that transcends all human understanding, because it comes not in our external circumstances but in our hearts and souls, peace with God.

When the Lord comes, he comes as King over all things. As we sang together in our sermon hymn, "Lo! He comes with clouds descending, once for every sinner slain; thousand, thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train: Christ the Lord returns to reign." We rejoice now, bringing news of peace and victory at what has already been won, to proclaim the peace and reconciliation between God and those who receive His gifts in faith. We rejoice to know that the victorious king is on his way, and until his arrival we continue to run ahead and share the good news.

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: Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

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.