

Michael J. Mathey
2nd to Last Sunday
November 16, 2025
Text: Luke 21:5 – 28
Title: A Sign of the Times

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Watching or listening to news reports it's easy to get the impression that the world is always facing some disaster or crisis. A hurricane slams into the United States, and the coverage almost always includes something about how those storms keep getting stronger. During the recent government shut-down the word "crisis" was thrown around to describe the back-ups at numerous airports around the country. The worse our national economy is the more reports are done about how hard it is for many people. And the tensions surrounding the fragile peace in the Middle East has people on the edge of their seat to see if another disaster is in the making from either side. With each major event someone always seems to point to it to as a sign of the world ending soon.

The end of the world. It's an event that people have looked for almost since the beginning of the world, and we are still looking for it today although I'm not sure that many people believe it will really happen. That's probably because there have been so many false alarms about when it will be or how it will happen. There was just another failed prediction of it last month. Many people were convinced that that would be the end of the world, and of course, they were disappointed.

When many of us were in school, the way that everyone expected that the world would end was a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Some of you probably remember getting under your school desks during an air-raid drill as if that would help you survive the feared nuclear explosion. Thankfully that fear never materialized, but it wasn't all

that long ago that our nation sent bombers over the nation of Iran to keep them from developing their own nuclear weapons.

Some people today believe that the world is going to end because of global warming or climate change, an environmental threat that may or may not be true depending on which scientists you listen too. If you listen to people who believe this, then this disaster is a foregone conclusion, and there is no doubt that the world will end because of it. On the other hand, there are people who believe that the world will endure until a giant asteroid destroys it in a massive collision. There was even a prediction that said that the world's end would coincide with the last date of the Mayan calendar in December of 2011. Regardless of the theory of how it will happen, there is a general understanding that this world will not last forever, and for once the Word of God is in agreement with the conventional wisdom of the human race.

Throughout His ministry here on earth, Christ made several statements to let us know that this world will not last forever, and those are in addition to the prophecies we find in the Old Testament. As the church year comes to a close once again next Sunday, we take some time to focus on some of these statements as we look ahead to the end of the world. Thanks to the Words of Jesus we are not left guessing how the world will end, we know that it will happen because of His return. The question today is how will we know that He is coming?

Listen again to the answer that Jesus gives to this same question in today's Gospel reading, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once...Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

From these Words, there is no question that God does not intend to maintain the world as we know it forever, but do we really believe it? It's hard to look around you and believe that someday everything that you see will no longer exist. That's how the disciples prompted this lesson from the Lord. They were looking at the temple, the most magnificent structure in the entire city of Jerusalem, the very dwelling place of God Himself on earth. If anything was going to last forever, surely it would be this magnificent building, but Christ declares to them that there will be a day when even the temple will be leveled.

Our world sees things in much the same way as the disciples did. How many people looked at the twin towers in New York City every day and never even considered the possibility that one day they wouldn't be there? For that matter, what about this sanctuary? There could be a fire tonight, and by tomorrow none of this would be here. But we are living in the very end times that Christ is speaking of, which means that things will only get worse from here for those who live a life of faith in Him.

Are you ready for any of this? Before you answer that let me remind you of the rest of the Gospel lesson. "But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake."

Now how ready are you? The devil and the world are ready to throw everything that they have against you. They want to do whatever it takes to lead you away from Christ, or at least to

get you thinking about anything but Him and His Word. One of the easiest ways for them to accomplish their work is to convince you that you don't deserve to suffer because you have faith in Christ, but here He is telling you just the opposite. If you have faith in Him, you will live a life that includes suffering. Do you have what it takes to endure until the end so that you will be saved? Of course you don't.

But if you're worried about not being able to endure until the end, then you probably don't need to worry. Why? Because it's a good sign that you have faith. If you had no faith, then you wouldn't care about losing it. Only someone who has faith will fear losing it before Christ returns. There's nothing wrong with fearing the loss of your faith.

But who wants to live in fear all the time? I sure don't, and God doesn't want you to live in fear for the rest of your life either, except for fear of His power and presence. For that reason, the Holy Spirit has been sent to you. The Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world to comfort your fears, and to lead you in your life of faith. It is His guidance that will enable you to endure until the return of Christ.

The Holy Spirit was first given to you at your baptism, and in that Sacrament He gave you the faith that you are now living. (*We saw the Holy Spirit do this very work once again this morning for little Baylyn as He claimed him as one of God's own children.*) It was the Holy Spirit who guided you here today in order to hear God's Word, and He is working in you even now to understand what is coming from God's Word today. The Holy Spirit teaches you to look to Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the hope of salvation, and He lets you know that because Christ endured the pain and suffering of the cross, you will be rewarded for enduring the pain and suffering of this world. This same Holy Spirit delivers all of the blessings of God to you when you partake of the Sacraments and personally study His Word.

It's impossible to know when God's Judgment will come. Only the Father knows when that will happen, and He is patient. He wants to give as many people as possible a chance to come to faith in His Son, and so He waits for the time that He has chosen. When that time arrives He will send Christ back, but He's not telling us when that will be.

Christ tells us that one more thing is sure to happen before that time arrives. The Gospel of the kingdom of God will be proclaimed throughout the entire world, and that's one more piece of work that the Holy Spirit does. He works through each of us to spread the Gospel to all of the earth, even in your own backyard, so that every nation will hear of the Lord's kingdom. The Spirit works through you to give you the right words that need to be said to the right person at the proper time.

But time is running out. The signs of the end are right before your very eyes. You only need to watch the news or read the headlines to see that. There won't be any rapture. You don't need to wait for the end-times to begin because they are already here. Christ will come one more time, not two more, and when He does come there will be no second chances. Those who have rejected the faith offered to them will be condemned to hell, and those who have endured in their faith will be given the gift of everlasting life.

It will not be an eternal life in heaven as many think. God's plan doesn't end there. Heaven is a temporary waiting ground for those who die before Christ's return, but on that day they will be given a new and glorified body along with those who are still living. It is then that the new heaven and the new earth will be created, and all of this world's suffering will be done forever. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.