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2nd to Last Sunday (Proper 28)
November 13, 2022
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. Throughout His ministry here on earth, Christ made several statements to let us know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this world will not last forever, and as the church year comes to a close next Sunday, we take some time in worship 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, and we know that it will happen because of the return of Christ. The question today is how will we be able to 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."

With these Words from Jesus Himself, there is no question that God does not intend to maintain the world as we know it forever, but do we really believe it? There are definitely times when 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, with some stones that were as large as about half of the room that we are

sitting in right now. Their incredible size and beautiful color would be impressive to anyone, but Christ declares to the disciples that there will be a day when even the temple will be leveled. It must have been a shocking prediction to them, but many of those same disciples would live long enough to see the Lord's prophecy fulfilled. Less than 40 years after Jesus prophesies that "...the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down," the temple was destroyed by Roman soldiers who had laid siege to Jerusalem because of a Jewish revolt in the year 70 AD. Less than 40 years!

Our world sees things in much the same way as the disciples did. We go through our day to day lives without any thought of these warnings from Jesus. A perfect example of this mentality was the shock of 9/11. 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? There was no awareness at all of the coming end that Jesus warns all of us about.

At the same time, there are plenty of people today who live as though everything in life is an utter disaster, and that we should constantly be fearful or angry or both. The environment is in danger, and if we don't worry about it everything will be destroyed. Depending on who you listened to last Monday, the future of our nation depended entirely on who you would vote for on Tuesday. And once the outcome of the election was obvious, many people obviously expected disaster to come. We've all watched the events unfold between Russia and Ukraine over the past several months, and there doesn't appear to be any end in sight to that conflict. Protests erupt in cities on a regular basis, and there is almost always violence, even when they're described as "mostly peaceful." But should these things really surprise us after today's Gospel reading? Remember, Jesus said, "Nation will rise against nation," and in the reactions that we see almost every election cycle, there is no question that our own nation rises against itself.

In the later part of the reading, Jesus tells us to, “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.” With these words, our Lord is telling us that spotting the signs of the coming end is not hard at all. It’s as easy as spotting the changing of the seasons when the trees begin to bud or to lose their leaves. It’s obvious once you know what to look for. And the fact is that as we read these words of our Lord and as we look around us we can see quite clearly that 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 question 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, and some of that suffering will happen because you have faith in

Jesus Christ. There are many outside of the church who believe that you and I are racists and bigots just for sitting here today and holding to God's Word. They blame all Christians in general for what's happening in the country today. Do you have what it takes to endure until the end as things get even worse? Can you endure so that you will be saved? Of course you can't.

But if you're worried about not being able to endure until the end even as things get worse around us, then you probably don't need to worry. Why? Because it turns out that that is a pretty good sign that you have faith. If you didn't have any faith, then you wouldn't be worried about losing it. Only someone who has faith will fear losing it before Christ returns. In this sense there is nothing wrong with fearing the loss of your faith.

But who wants to live in fear all of 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 He gave you the faith that you are now living. 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 my mouth. 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 the judgment will occur. 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 occurs 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 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 we are living right in the middle of them! Christ will come one more time, not two more, and when He does 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. Come quickly Lord Jesus! Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.