

9 November 2003
Third Last Sunday in Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Whole Lot of Shakin’ Going On!”
Text: Mark 13:1-13; Hebrews 12:26-29

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

“Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Not exactly the answer the disciples expected! This was not good. And imagine what happened next. There is silence as they walk away from the Temple and out of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, and go up the Mount of Olives. You know, that awkward, uncomfortable kind of silence. For what are the disciples to say in response to those words of Jesus!? And they sit, as we are told, on the Mount of Olives, ***“opposite the Temple,”*** perhaps looking at the Temple. And there’s probably a little more awkward silence, until one of the disciples just can’t take it anymore, and blurts out, ***“Tell us! Tell us, will you! You can’t just say something like that and leave it at that! Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”***

OK, Jesus says. And it doesn’t get any better. Turmoil, persecution, and hatred.

These are the end times. The things that will happen more and more frequently as the end of the world nears. The end times which would begin with Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, because once Jesus completed our redemption, the end could come at any time with Jesus’ return at any time. And until that day comes, Jesus is telling His disciples (and us!), do not expect things to be easy, and to do expect them to get better. . . . And so on this eve of Jesus’ arrest that will lead to His crucifixion, He uses this opportunity to teach His disciples about what will happen.

And all of these things Jesus talked about, we do see happening! This was not just about the time of the disciples. The Temple *has* been destroyed. There are false teachers and false leaders – both outside and inside the church – deceiving people and leading them away from Christ. There are wars and strife, earthquakes and famines, great fires and terrorism. There is hatred and persecution against Christians. There are parents being

ethanized by their children. Creation seems to be falling apart. Man seems to be falling deeper into moral and spiritual decay. Things are not getting better . . . for Satan is like a cornered wild animal, and the closer the end gets for him, the harder he is going to fight.

Now for some people, this is more information than they want to know! Ignorance is bliss! Why can't we just *go peaceful into that good night?*

Well the reason is that it is important for you to know this – otherwise Jesus would not have told us! But Jesus did not speak these words to scare us or worry us or cause us anxiety, but to teach us something very important. And the key to understanding that are the words of Jesus in the verse that I have so far left out of the discussion. The words that Jesus “snuck in” right in the middle of telling His disciples all those bad things that are going to happen. The words of Jesus that don't seem to fit, but are just parked there, right in the middle of all of this . . . when Jesus says, “***And the Gospel must as of first importance be proclaimed to all nations.***”

Now why did Jesus stick those words in the midst of this discussion of destruction and hardship and turmoil? Because they help us make sense of all that is going to happen, and that we see happening. *Because it is precisely through those events that the Gospel will be spread.* For the unfortunate truth is that for most people, when life is good and going smoothly, there is simply no interest in the Gospel and the things of God. But when there is a transition in life, or a tragedy in life, or a crisis – then there is often times also the opportunity to communicate the Gospel. To speak about the cross. To speak about God's solution to sin and the evil in this world. To put things into a Heavenly perspective for those who are so earthly-minded, and comfortable, and self-satisfied.

And this is what Jesus was actually also doing with His disciples with these words! They had pointed out to Him the wonderful Temple complex, these wonderful stones and buildings. But what made the Temple glorious was not the stones or the buildings, but the One who promised to dwell in the Temple for the good and benefit of His people. And so Jesus has to re-orient the disciples a bit, and take their attention away from the Temple as a building. For it is not what men make that is glorious, but what God makes that is glorious. **His Kingdom, not ours.** And so even a tent carried through the wilderness could be glorious, because God was there and building His kingdom. And even a Magnificent Temple can be inglorious, if it becomes an idol and an object of worship instead of God.

But it is not only for the world and the disciples that God must do this – but also for us. God must tear down all that we trust in; all that takes our attention from Him; all that we look to besides Him for what we need, or for meaning, or for blessing. In order to save

us. Whether that is buildings, or nations, or power, or money, or health, or whatever. And that is also what we heard about in the Epistle from Hebrews, where we heard, ***“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken – that is, the things that have been made – in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.”*** And the picture there is like a sieve. Shaking. God shaking all that we trust in besides Him. God removing all that we trust in besides Him. God sifting out all that we have made and built; our idols and gods; our misplaced trust and reliance . . . ***“in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.”*** In order that what He has made, what He has given and built and established, namely our faith, may remain. And that may not be easy, and it may not be pleasant. But it is good.

And what are those things in your life? Things that you point to. Things that you consider your accomplishments, your foundation, your security in this life. Who or what you look to for what you need, or for meaning. Your idols and gods. . . . Its sometimes hard to think in those terms, so instead think of where you spend your time; where you put your money; what you think you couldn’t live without. For where your time, your money, and your devotion is, there is your heart, and there is your god. And its not that God doesn’t want us to have good things in life, and people that we love – He most certainly does! They are blessings from Him! But have they become more than gifts from God? More than what God has intended them to be? . . . And so perhaps it is also us who need a little shaking, a little re-orientation, ***“in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.”*** That by the Gospel, our faith and trust be only in the one, true God and the Kingdom that He is building.

But can we do that? Can we keep our faith and trust in the right place? Can we, as we heard at the end of Jesus’ words, ***“endure to the end?”*** For ***“the one who endures to the end will be saved.”*** . . . Well, no. We are weak and sinful. We fall for the devil’s lies. We more easily trust in what we can see than what we cannot see, the things that *can* be shaken rather than the things that *cannot* be shaken. On our own, we would be lost. . . .

But that is why our Saviour has given us His Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, and why we pray in it *Thy Kingdom Come*. Because we need Him and His Kingdom to come to us. The end is coming, and Jesus is coming, and the Kingdom of God is coming, yes, and it can all be very overwhelming and frightening to think about! . . . And so we pray in this petition of the Lord’s Prayer that the Kingdom of God would come to us – not only in the end – **but already here and now**. That God our Saviour would come to us and keep us in His Kingdom here and now, in the midst of so many and great enemies and dangers. That He would come to us in His **Word**, to teach us and keep our eyes and faith focused on Him. That He would come to us in His **Baptism**, to make us and our children His

children and members of His Kingdom. That He would come to us in His **Absolution**, that our doubts and fears and mistrust and misbelief would be forgiven. And that He would come to us in His **Supper**, that in communion with Him we would be kept and strengthened in our faith, living in Him and He is us, ready to face whatever may come. Ready to endure to the end, that we be part of the Kingdom of God already here in time, and forever in eternity.

And the One who died on the cross for you, who shed His blood for you, who rose and ascended into Heaven for you, has not only taught you to pray in this way, but has promised to hear and do these very things. To keep you now, strong in His faith and forgiveness, until you die and ascend with Him, to His Heavenly Kingdom which cannot be shaken. Not now, and not ever.

And so as the writer to the Hebrews concludes, ***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”*** Acceptable worship, which is simply to repent and receive. To repent of all that is ours, and receive from your Saviour all that is His. All that He has done for you. . . . And then, with faith and forgiveness that cannot be shaken, we have the opportunity to confess. To confidently confess our faith and life to a world in the end times. To a world that is shaking and teetering on the brink. To people whose lives are being broken and shattered. To communities lost and adrift in a world where there is no truth and everything is relative. What an opportunity we have, as the disciples had, when Temples and institutions and foundations are crumbling, to stand firm and confess the truth. The truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth that in Him, the end of the world holds no fear – but is simply the beginning of eternal life in Heaven!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.