

23 November 2003  
Last Sunday of the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The God Who is Able”

Text: Mark 13:32-37; Jude 20-25; Isaiah 51:4-6

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

There is coming an end to this world. It may be sooner, it may be later, but it will happen. As we heard from the prophet Isaiah, ***“the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner.”*** Thus saith the Lord. Its going to happen. . . . And it seems to me that when faced with this news, people tend to react in one of two ways: either they act like Chicken Little and run around saying *“The end is coming! The end is coming!”*; or, they ignore it, and think that its never going to happen – or at least, not as long as they are alive.

But neither of those attitudes is helpful, and neither of them is how our Lord would have us think about the end. Rather, as He says four times in the Holy Gospel that we heard this evening, we are to ***“Stay awake.”*** And that doesn’t mean that we can’t sleep! It means, rather, that we are to be sober about the coming of the end. That we are not to over-react in fear, but neither are we to ignore the fact that the Day is coming. We are to take seriously the fact that our days are numbered, and that the Father knows the day and the hour when the end will come.

And so until that happens, we are to live the lives that God has given us, and live in the vocations that He has given us, as a worker or boss, as a father or mother, as a son or daughter, as a friend or neighbor – but always with a sober eye toward the end. Not living in worry and fear, but also not as if this is all there is. Always knowing that the Day is coming when ***“the master of the house will return.”*** And therefore knowing that what we do now is important, because we may not get the chance to do it again.

For as someone once said, the Last Day is *“too late day.”* On that day, those who will have waited will find out that it’s now too late. And that doesn’t just apply to unbelievers – that includes you and I. For if sometimes we wonder why God is taking so long, and what He is waiting for before He comes again . . . and if sometimes we wonder why people seem to take so long, and what they are waiting for before they return to God and to Church . . . know that it is that very same question that is to be asked of you and me:

*what are you waiting for?* The day is coming, so what are you waiting for before you speak to your neighbor? Before you approach your co-worker or friend? Before you teach your children? What are you waiting for? . . . It's a good question.

And as a Pastor, that is something that I have to impress upon people often, for we don't know the last day of the world, or the last day of our lives. And so if you have a friend or a family member, for instance, who is dying, don't wait until they are dead to call me or another pastor! That is "*too late day!*" There is nothing more than can be done for that person. Please call before they die, before it is too late, while there is still opportunity to speak to them about Christ, and His love and forgiveness. *What are you waiting for?* . . . But even as that is something that I, as a pastor, have to impress upon others, it is also something that I, as a person, often struggle with, finding myself waiting, or putting off, or thinking that there is *plenty of time* for all that. But is there?

Do not fear, but do not ignore. Stay awake. Be sober.

And how we do that is ably spelled out for us in the Epistle from Jude. For there we heard three things. First, while we are waiting, while we are living, "***Beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.***" Build yourself up in the faith by staying in the Word. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Read and learn the Catechism, the basics of the faith. For this will keep you sober and awake and grounded, so that you do not go to either extreme, either of fear or complacency.

Next, while we are waiting, while we are living, "***pray in the Holy Spirit.***" For it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who teaches us to pray, and who prays for us. Pray for yourself; pray for your family; pray for your neighbors; pray for your enemies. For these prayers not only ascend to the throne of God in the Spirit, they will work in your heart as well, to keep you sober and awake. For those you pray for you cannot hate. Those you pray for you will not forget.

And then third, while we are waiting, while we are living, "***keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.***" And when you hear "***the love of God***" there, that doesn't mean just some warm, fuzzy feeling – but the love that God showed you; the love that God demonstrated to you. For God's love is nowhere so great as it was on the hard wood of the cross, enduring the sharp thorns and nails and the piercing spear, bearing your sins and paying the price for them. God's love for you is Christ crucified. Keep yourself in Him, Jude is saying, in Christ crucified. . . . And the means to do that are here, as you are joined to Christ crucified in Holy Baptism; as you receive the crucified body and blood in Holy Communion; as you hear the crucified Christ's words from the cross, "***Father, forgive them***" spoken to you in

the Absolution. Here is your connection. Keep yourself in these things, the signs of the true love of God for you, and you will stay sober and awake. For in looking at Christ's first coming in suffering, you will also keep in mind His second coming in glory.

And thus sober and awake, thus living in the love, mercy, and forgiveness of our God and Saviour, Jude continues, ***“And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”*** And perhaps we can understand those things best by describing them in terms of their opposites: being sober and awake in Christ, have mercy, do not condemn or ignore. Being sober and awake about the end, save others, snatching them out of the fire – do not wait or assume someone else will do it. And being sober and awake, do not be friendly with the sin in this world; the sin that, as we heard last week, ***“so easily entangles.”***

Be sober. Stay awake.

But we must admit, that is more easily said than done! Too often we are like that child that tries to stay awake on Christmas Eve – we may have the best of intentions, but we just aren't able. We try to avoid sin, but we're weak. The busyness of life intrudes and causes us to put off our time in God's Word and prayer. We are fearful to speak against sin. Our judgments are quick, our mercy is slow, our forgiveness hard. We take God's gifts for granted. The pleasures of this life distract and intoxicate us so easily. We are not able, in so many ways.

But that is why Jude doesn't end there, but concludes with words that are so simple, and yet so profound and comforting: ***“Now to Him who is able.”*** And just consider, for a moment, the significance of that little sentence: ***“the God who is able.”*** We are unable, but He is able. And what is He able to do? Not only everything – that's too general. He is able, according to Jude, ***“to keep you from stumbling [or falling] and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory.”***

He is able to keep you from falling. And how many ways and times there are for us to fall. How many traps, how many doubts and fears. . . . But we trust in the God who is able! Able to keep us from falling. Able to pick us up when we do fall. Able to give us strength when we are weak. Able to deliver when we are in danger. Able to keep and preserve us in the faith. And able to ***“present you blameless before the presence of His glory.”*** Able to present you blameless, forgiven – because at the cross He took your blame, your guilt, away.

And He is able because as the Psalmist tells us, He is the God who ***“neither slumbers nor***

*sleeps.*” He is able because He is the God who was not only crucified for us, but who rose from death for us and lives. He is able because in His death and resurrection, He stripped sin and death and the devil of all their powers. He is able, because this Jesus, once crucified, but now risen, is also ascended to the right hand of the throne of God . . . and wants you there with Him! He is able, because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords and He is able to give you His kingdom, and His victory, and His Sonship. He is able.

And not only is He able, there is nothing that He would rather do! And so it is all His gift to you. His life and death, a gift to you. His Word and Sacraments, a gift to you. His Kingdom and victory, a gift to you. And that you may receive all of this, He gives you also the gift of faith. He is able, He has done it, and it is yours!

So each day as we draw one day closer to the end of the world, do not fear and do not ignore, but live the life that God has given you, and live in the vocations that He has given you – trusting in ***“the God who is able.”*** Until that last day comes for you, and the God who is able keeps His promises to you, and takes you home, where you join – once and for all – the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven. And to that God, the Lord of the last times, ***“be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”***

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.