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Pentecost 26

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Confident in the One Who Endured to the End”
Text: Mark 13:1-13; Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-25

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

Jesus says a lot of frightening things in the Holy Gospel today.

First, He tells His disciples that the Temple they were just standing in and which engulfed them with its size, would be destroyed. And not just a little. ***Not one stone upon another*** would be left. Complete and utter destruction. A pile a rubble is all that would be left. Then, He says, there will be false prophets and false messiahs speaking false truths, and they will not be mocked or ignored - they will be popular and ***will lead many astray***. But the trouble won't only be spiritual. There will be wars - ***nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom***. And the trouble will not just be man made. Creation, too, will convulse. There will be natural disasters - ***earthquakes*** and ***famines***. And then the trouble would get personal. There will also be persecution because the truth will not be popular, and those who speak it will be put on trial and suffer for it. And if all that was not enough, Jesus says that even family members will turn against each other. All in all, not a pretty picture, nor an easy life. ***Trouble such as never has been***, according to Daniel. Indeed.

These are birth pains, Jesus says. The beginning of new life, coming to be. The *birthing* of the new heavens and the new earth, for the new you. The new you, raised from sin and death, to live a new, eternal life. One where all these frightening things will be no more, for sin will be no more. There will be only new. Life without death. Love without heartbreak. Unity without division. Fulfillment, not disappointment. Nothing broken, everything good again, as it was in the beginning.

But not yet. This all must take place first, Jesus says. And it has been, since 70 AD when what Jesus said about the Temple, happened. When one last straw broke Rome's back and they came in and leveled not just the Temple, but the whole city of Jerusalem. And ever since, these things have been taking place. That's why, as I said last week, Christians in every era have thought they were living in the end times. They were! And we are. Just in the ***not yet***. But one day the birth pains will end and the baby will be born.

So what a perfect example that is - birth pains - for it was a baby that started all this. Oh, not the wars and disasters, division and persecution - that all is the result of sin. That all

has been around since Cain decided to kill his brother Abel. But the birth of a baby, the birth of Jesus, was the beginning of the end. The beginning of the end of all the wars and disasters, division and persecution. And the beginning of the end of the Temple, too. Because it would no longer be needed. For once Jesus came and offered Himself as the all time, single sacrifice for the sin of the world, no more sacrifices were needed. In fact, no sacrifice *could* do anything any longer, for Jesus had atoned for all sin; there was nothing left to sacrifice for. And so the Temple became like washboards, TV antennas, and pay phones - a thing of the past.

But with those words, Jesus was not trying to frighten His disciples - or us - but give them hope. True hope.

For remember why Jesus spoke these words. They were in response to the disciples marveling at the Temple and how wonderful it is. But Jesus knows better. He knows nothing in this world is going to last forever. And so Jesus reminds the disciples of that - of how the world is crumbling and coming apart at the seams. And if that's what you're counting on, if that's where your hope is, in anything of this world, then you're going to be disappointed at best, and fearful and hopeless at worst. And many today are.

So what instead? Well, the answer is embedded in the words Jesus spoke; words that are often, in fact, misunderstood. When in the midst of talking about all these troubles, Jesus said: ***the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations***. Some have heard those words as meaning that we'd better step up our game and get better at proclaiming the Gospel throughout the world *so that* Jesus can come and end all this! He's waiting for us! So, if you want Jesus to come, you'd better get out there!

Uh, no. Jesus already knows when He's coming again. And that's not why we tell others about Jesus - to get this world over with and escape to heaven. No. As messed up as this world may be, the things of this world are still given to us by God to enjoy. Remember, He created them good! Rather, what Jesus means is this: ***the gospel must, of first importance, be proclaimed to all nations***. Or in other words, when you see all these things happening - the world crumbling and coming apart at the seams, the wars and disasters, the division and persecution - see these things as an opportunity to speak what really matters, to proclaim the hope that we have. That hope that others need, too. That yes, this world is falling apart and is filled with disappointment and death, and there is sadness and fear - but there is hope. Of a future. For ***the one who endures to the end will be saved***.

Now, that part about enduring doesn't (at first) sound like good news, does it? For it sounds like it's putting the onus on you to endure to the end. But that's not the Gospel! For we have doubts and fears too! And how often can we not even make it to the end of the day without stumbling and falling. The one who endures to the end? *It's not me. Will it be me? It can't be me!*

Well, relax. **The one who endured to the end was Jesus.** He was the one put on trial. He was the one rejected by His family and those in His hometown. He was the one betrayed and put to death on the cross. He was *the one*. But He endured it all and was faithful to the end. For you. So that joined to Him, in Him, we will be saved, too. His doing, not ours.

And that's why we have hope. That's the Gospel. If it depended on me, or you, well, who knows, right? But because of what Jesus did for us, we heard from Hebrews that we can *draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith*. In confidence!

We can *draw near* . . . to God, the each other, to troubles, to persecutions, to the end of our life, to the end all things, without fear. For we are not alone, but have the one who has conquered every evil, forgiven every sin, and made us children of God. Your *hearts* have been *sprinkled clean* . . . and your *bodies washed with pure water* when you were baptized into Jesus. And so in Him you are safe. In Him you have hope and a sure and certain future. In Jesus, we can *draw near* to whatever comes our way . . .

We can *draw near with a true heart* . . . a heart that truthfully confesses our sin, to God and to one another. And a heart made true, made pure, by the forgiveness of sin that we hear here and that we hear from each other. Forgiveness that takes away fear and opens us to God and to one another; that restores what sin has divided and brings us together again.

And so *we can draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith* . . . in full assurance of all the promises of God made and fulfilled in Jesus. And especially His promise to be with us here with His Body and Blood, to feed and strengthen our weak and often-wavering faith. That as we are in Him and He is in us, we will endure to the end. He will see to it. Here is all that we need. Here is the end already breaking into the here and now, as the same Jesus who will come in the end comes now, for you.

And so, the words from Hebrews go on to say, *let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*, for how much does a world with wars and disasters, division and persecution, need your love and good works? How much do those locked in fear and hopelessness need your love and words of encouragement? And need the hope and confidence that we have in Jesus?! As of first importance. And we need it, too. So let us *not neglect meeting together*, it says, to hear of His faithfulness, His victory, and to receive the gifts of God given here. And to encourage one another. **And all the more**, he says, *as you see the Day drawing near*. All the more, as the need grows greater and greater.

For how many have given up on things in this world and in their lives? Given up on peace, given up on politics, given up on friendships, given up on marriage, given up on

things getting better, given up on themselves? For our world is a mess and shows no signs of getting better. Wars and disasters, division and persecution - they're just getting worse, right?

Maybe. I don't think there was ever a "golden age" that didn't have these things in one form or another. But know that in the midst of just such a world and life, there is a ray of hope. A light in the darkness. That one day the birth pains will end and the baby will be born. But this time, the new life will be the new heavens and the new earth for the new you. The you made new by Jesus. And as you die and rise with Him by faith each day, dying to yourself, dying to sin, each day, and rising in His forgiveness each day, being made new each day, then you can wait for that Last Day, that new day, with confidence, for you've been practicing for it. And the Saviour who saves you with His forgiveness now, will be the Saviour who saves you in the end.

And so come war, disaster, division, persecution, whatever; come sickness, disease, struggle, or death; come trials, troubles, hatred, or fears - in this bad news, crumbling world, you can face all these things with confidence. For the one who endured to the end will see you through it all, just as He went through it all.

So as we especially remember at the end of another church year, the Church prays: *Come, Lord Jesus!* Come, yes, at the end. But come even more now. Wash us, forgive us, teach us, feed us. Make us ready. Make us new. That we be confident not in ourselves or anything in this world - but in You.

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.