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Pentecost 25

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Living Now with a View to the End”
Text: Mark 13:1-13; Hebrews 10:11-25

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

I suppose it's like this in other neighborhoods as well, but when you're driving to church or driving through Vienna, it is hard to miss all the large and beautiful houses that are going up everywhere. Two right next to our church here. Gone are the smaller and more modest homes of the past. Now is the time of larger and grander. Some of the homes just done our road here have 9 bedrooms and bathrooms and price tags to match.

Now, this isn't necessarily bad. It's not wrong to have a nice big home, nor is it better to have a small, modest home. But I do think it says something about our society today, where we're at, and what is valued. Why were people of not that many years ago satisfied with smaller homes and sharing bathrooms and children sharing bedrooms, while today everyone must have their own bedroom, their own bathroom, and even husbands and wives each have their own sinks in a shared bathroom? Do we find our value as people no longer in who we are and what we believe, but rather what we have? Not in the content of our character or our faith, but in the size of our homes and cars and bank accounts?

So if Jesus were here today, I think it not the Temple that His believers would point out to Him, *but their homes*. ***“Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”*** What wonderful mansions and beautiful, spacious houses! And Jesus would say to us, ***“Do you see these great buildings? These great homes? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”***

Think that might get some people's attention today? Get you labeled a “domestic terrorist?” Good! Your attention is what Jesus wants. That you put not your trust in anything or anyone or any achievement in this world, but in Him alone. Because all this stuff is going away. All this stuff is coming to an end. So if this is where you find your value and life, your meaning and purpose; if this is what you are pursuing and going after . . . then you and your life are, too . . . coming to an end.

But Jesus doesn't want that. He came that you *may have life and have it abundantly* (John 10:10). Which means: life now, and life forever.

So when one of His disciples points to the Temple and makes this comment (true as it might have been!) . . . and the other disciples hear it and ask about it . . . well, it's time to do some teaching. About **how we live now with a view to the end**.

Now, most people don't like to think about the end - either the end of their lives or the end of the world. We don't like to think about death. Which makes sense. We weren't ever meant to die. We were created to live. But we chose death. We choose death. For that is really what sin is: choosing death over life. Choosing our way over God's way. And so like it or not, death is a reality. The funeral homes and cemeteries that dot our community are there for a reason.

But still, it's a long way off, isn't it? We have plenty of time, don't we? Maybe. That's how we tend to think, even when we're older and know better. But one day that won't be true. One day death will come upon us - perhaps suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, when that driver runs the red light and smashes into you. Or the end will come when Jesus comes again. That day will be sudden and unexpected. But a long way off? Plenty of time? Maybe not.

And then that big, beautiful house will either have a "For Sale" sign in front of it, or look like a homeless person's cardboard box compared with the home Jesus has prepared for you. And all that money in your bank account will either be spent by someone else, or be like Monopoly money in the kingdom of God. And what we thought so important, so worth our time and energy, so important to our value and self-esteem . . . not so much. We majored in minors and missed what really matters . . .

Even something as important as the Temple was only for a limited time and purpose. And, you may remember, God never really cared about having a big, beautiful, magnificent Temple! He was perfectly happy with a tent. The Temple was David's idea, and then first built by Solomon. God let him do it. His heart was in the right place. But what happened was that people then put their heart in the wrong place - in the Temple itself. And thought that because they had the Temple, they were safe and secure. They put their trust in the building instead of the one who dwelled there.

So God destroyed it. Brought the Babylonians in to tear it to the ground. So they would put their trust in HIM, not in a building!

But then, a few centuries later, it happened again. King Herod rebuilt the Temple and made it even *more* grand and beautiful and bigger than ever before. And, "*Look Jesus! What a great and magnificent Temple!*"

But God was perfectly happy with a tent. He just wanted to dwell with His people. To holy us. To forgive our sins. To give us life. **And now He had come in a tent of flesh and blood to do just that!** But eyes and hearts and minds captured by the things of this

world and life were missing it. Were missing Him. Many today, too. Maybe even us at times. Focusing on, trusting in, what we have, who is elected, what we can do, rather than the one who comes to us humbly and to direct our eyes and hopes and faith to Him who gives what is going to last forever.

The disciples ask Him when? ***When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?*** Jesus doesn't tell them when. But He does point to signs. Signs they saw then and signs we see now. False teachers. Wars and rumors of wars. Natural disasters. Persecution and hatred. And even members of a family turning against one another. These are signs of the end for they are the manifestations of sin - sin that brings the end and death. And that attack everything in this world. Big, beautiful houses are quickly consumed by flood and fire and family disputes. Businesses and accomplishments are consumed by lawsuits and hatred. Nations and peoples conquered and destroyed in war. The sin that devoured life in the beginning is still hungry and you are on the menu.

Signs? *Look around*, Jesus is saying. *It's happening*. And it's not going to stop.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Well there's some pressure! Are you up to that? Up to the task? Strong enough? Steadfast enough? Those disciples weren't. They ran away. They denied. And you? The devil doesn't even need to try that hard to get you to sin, does he? A little of this, a little of that, and you've fallen again. *Endure to the end?* We can't even endure to the end *of the day!*

But there's one who did. And it wasn't easy. He took both barrels from the devil. Stared straight into the face of death. Was forsaken by His Father. And the pressure of bearing all the sin of all the world, of all people of all time, caused Him to sweat great drops of blood. And He endured. He won. Not to save Himself, but to save you. He's the one, the Temple, that was destroyed, but then built again, raised to life again, never to die again. The tent in whom is forgiveness, life, and salvation. Even though He didn't look great. But He was. And He will, when He comes again in glory. He's the one.

So to ***endure to the end***, for us, is to remain in the one who can do what we cannot do. To remain in Jesus. To know that while there is nothing in this world that you can count on - not even yourself! - you can count on Him. On His Word, His promises, His forgiveness, and His life. In Him you *will be* saved because in Him you ARE saved. Even now. For His gifts are not just for the future, but for now.

So just as God dwelled among His people in tent and Temple in the Old Testament to forgive them and give them life, so He is today, in the tent and Temple of his flesh. That's what we heard from Hebrews earlier: ***Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places*** (that is, the presence of God) ***by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through***

his flesh . . . therefore *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith* (confidently!), *with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*. Our hearts and bodies washed with the blood of Jesus in baptism. *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering* (that's Jesus! He's our hope!), *for he who promised is faithful*. That is, He said He would do it, and He did. He came for you, died for you, rose for you, lives for you, and now comes for you in the tents of water and words and bread and wine. *Truly* magnificent dwellings of God and His forgiveness and life, even though they do not look like much.

But if we could just see them as God sees them . . .

. . . if we could just see that **water in the font** raising someone dead in their trespasses and sins just as surely as Jesus grabbed the hand of the dead and brought them back to life!

. . . if we could just see **the absolution** giving life and hope to us just as surely as when Jesus spoke from the cross "Father, forgive them!" and "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise!"

. . . if we could just see that **bread and wine on the altar** feeding us with the food of heaven, if we could just see Jesus handing us His Body and Blood here just as surely as His hands passed out bread and fish and fed more than 5,000 people!

. . . if we could just hear Him speaking to us **in His Word**, just as surely as He spoke to the apostles, to the multitudes, to Lazarus when He raised Him from the dead!

. . . if we could just see **these humble tents** as Temples of the Most High God coming to us and forgiving us and holiyng us and lifing us!

If we could, would we *ever* neglect to be here? Or, as we heard from Hebrews, *neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but [instead] encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*.

But all that is exactly what **IS** happening here, and eyes of faith **DO** see it. And in these humble tents and Temples we endure in Him as He lives in us. And so we are saved. By Him. He promised.

He promised that *whoever believes and is baptized will be saved* (Mark 16:16).

He promised that *whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day* (John 6:54).

He promised that *if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them* (John 20:23).

He promised that *the one who hears you* **hears me** (Luke 10:16).

He promised that *this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should* **have eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:40).

He promised that *where two or three are gathered in my name,* **there am I among them** (Matthew 18:20).

Those are words and promises you can count on in a world that is passing away, for as Jesus also said: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away* (Matthew 24:35). Not now. Not ever. For after everything in this world is destroyed, Jesus will remain. For He did pass away, but then rose from the dead. And in Him, so will you.

So every time you come to church and drive by all the big, beautiful houses now in this neighborhood, and come to our humble, not very grand looking church, **look at all these things through the eyes of faith** and see as Jesus sees. That all these new, big houses will soon grow old and crumble and pass away, while this humble, simple church gives out what will not and can not pass away, to old, sinful, passing away you, who coming here is made new and given a life that will never pass away.

How about that? That of all the new, big, beautiful things in this neighborhood, the best and most beautiful are right here. Bought not with millions, but with blood. The blood of God. Poured out on the cross, and poured out here, for 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.