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Pentecost 23

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Quietly Confident”

Text: Luke 21:5-36; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-13; Malachi 4:1-6

[Some of the thoughts and words of this sermon from Rev. Dr. Adam Koontz in Concordia Pulpit Resources, 32.4, 38-41.]

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

Many of the words we heard today, from Malachi, from Jesus, are . . . how shall we characterize them? Disturbing? Unsettling? Frightening?

Blazing fire and utter destruction. The destruction of the Temple. False preachers and prophets. Wars and tumults. Earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. Terrors in the heavens and on the earth. Persecution and death. Jerusalem surrounded by armies, and then trampled underfoot. Nations in distress, people perplexed and fainting with fear. ***And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*** Coming to a world which, quite honestly, seems at that point to be hanging on by a thread.

Many of these things have already happened. The Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem trampled underfoot - although it has since been rebuilt. The city, at least. Not the Temple. Earthquakes and famines continue. We just came out of a two year pestilence. Wars and tumults end in one place only to pop up in another. Nations in distress, people either not knowing what to think or hyperventilating in fear. And the wrong finger on the wrong button could quickly cut that thread the world is hanging on. For hundreds of years, thousands of years, people have seen all these things and thought: *this is it. This must be it.*

But so far, no ***Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.***

Some people among the Thessalonians, though, thought Jesus had already come again. And they missed it. They missed Him. So now what? Nothing really matters now, does it? if that is true. So Paul writes to reassure them. *Oh, no, Jesus hasn't returned yet! Lots of terrible, horrible, no good, very bad things still to come!* OK, he didn't say that, even though it was true. But with all this going on, he says, do this: ***pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead.*** That in these uncertain, perilous, perhaps frightening times, the truth of God's Word be proclaimed in all the world, to help those who don't

know what to think, and that people not be deceived or misled by untruths or half-truths. And for this truth especially to spread: that in the midst of all this, ***the Lord is faithful***. And that ***He will establish you and guard you against the evil one***. That no matter what happens, we have a Father and Saviour who does what He says. Always. That when there's nothing in this world that you can count on, you can count on Him. Therefore, Paul prays for the Thessalonians, ***May the Lord*** - this faithful Lord, this establishing and guarding Lord - ***direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ***. But direct your hearts and minds not to a God far away, but to where is the reason for our confidence and faith: **to the cross**. To the God who would do that, who would come into this messed-up and self-destructive world and shed His blood, for you. To save you and a world that seems to be falling apart at the seams.

For the cross was the culmination of His faithfulness, the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. Which promise of His failed? Which wasn't fulfilled? Not a single one. And not a single day has gone by when you have lived apart from His care and love. Maybe you've known it, maybe you haven't, maybe it has seemed as if God was not caring and loving at all. And yet He was. There all the time. Working for you and your salvation. In small ways, big ways, and even to the point of sending His Son to die for your sins and the sins of the whole world. ***The Lord is faithful*** indeed.

And ***steadfast***, as Paul then said. The world? Changing constantly. It did in Paul's day, and in ours. What we thought was sure, wasn't. What we thought would last, didn't. What we thought we could count on, let us down. Life flies by, and who knows what tomorrow will bring? But ***the Word of the Lord endures forever***. That is what is sure and steadfast. That is what we can count on when there's nothing we can count on. In every bad day, week, month, or year; in every little difficulty or big bill, every temporary inconvenience, or life-altering accident or diagnosis; in every anxious day and sleepless night, you have a loving Father who knows, and a steadfast Saviour who went through it, too. Who went through all the suffering of this world and life, and rose victorious, that you will, too. So that whatever comes, and however difficult, it will not, can not, defeat you who are in Christ Jesus and in His care.

So maybe, as Jesus said, the fig tree is in full leaf and the kingdom of God is near. As I said, people for hundreds and thousands of years have thought so - one of these days we're going to be right. ***But until that day, what?*** Until that day, how shall we live? We hear about that, too, today.

Jesus mentions two ditches for us to avoid. The first is one of denial, of ***dissipation and drunkenness***. That is, to drink and party, have fun, and try to forget about all that we see happening, all the signs. The other, the opposite ditch, is to get so wrapped up in the trials, troubles, and tribulations, all the ***cares of this life***, that we get crushed under them, see no way out, and give up. Both, actually, are ways of giving up, aren't they? And, obviously, neither of those is where we want to be. Neither of those is helpful. Neither of

those will help us, or others.

And how can we give up on a Saviour who never gives up on us? Who is faithful and true to every Word, every promise? Who not only died on the cross for you, but then washed you clean with the blood He shed there for you in your Baptism, who speaks the same word of forgiveness He spoke there to you here in the Absolution, who feeds you with the Body and Blood He took on in His birth to hang there on the cross, and who at His Ascension told you: *I'm not leaving you; lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). All these things are the answers to our prayers, how Jesus gives us the ***strength to escape***. All these things will enable us to ***stand before the Son of Man*** at His coming with confidence and joy.

But life isn't just about getting through, hanging on. All these things also enable us to live our lives now in a way fitting for believers; suitable for we who are confident that our Father is providing for us each and every day. Paul uses a particularly apt word here for this: *quietness*. ***Do your work quietly***.

Now *what does that mean?* Well, first of all, and most obvious of all, that is the opposite of running your mouth, which seems to be a particular problem in our day and age, but it was in Paul's day, too. Then and now, we have people yammering on about everything, having an opinion on every subject, hurting others with their words, and not caring whether what they say is true or not - it doesn't matter, as long as they're heard. Paul calls them ***busybodies***, who were all talk and no action. Who just stirred up trouble and strife and didn't lift a finger to help. That's not right or good or helpful; not why we're here. So to that, Paul said, ***If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat***. Which sounds pretty harsh, but all talk and no work - as attractive as that may sound - has its consequences.

Jesus knew that. He knew that forgiveness and mercy were not just words but would cost His life, and He laid down his life for you. **Paul** knew that Jesus had paid his whole debt of sin and he preached that, but he also imitated Christ and laid down his life for those he preached to. He worked for his own support so these Christians wouldn't have to go without the Gospel because they couldn't pay him.

And this **you** know, too. That Jesus backed up His words with deeds and paid the debt of your sin - all of it! - freeing you to now bear the cost of others, imitating Paul who imitated Christ. Not just talk a good game, but provide food for people in need, help women who are pregnant and in need, support those who are elderly and can't take care of things like they used to, give rides, pray for those in need, go out of your way. And you don't need to crow about it and tell everyone the good you're doing. But just as Christ bore your burden and Paul the Thessalonians', so we who are in Christ are always bearing one another's burdens. And if we're not . . . well, that is not a life in Christ, the one who bore us and all our sins.

That's why Paul is so definite and says what he does to us today - that we not fall into a vain and empty life that is all talk, even if it's good and pious talk; a life that sounds good but does nothing; that speaks of love but shows no love. Luther said the same thing when he said: *Faith alone saves, yes, but faith is never alone*. Faith is always active in love. Because faith is **quietly confident** in Christ. Confident in all that He has done for us, so we rest in His love and love others. We can rest from our labors to save ourselves and instead serve others. Quietly. At peace. Not needing recognition. But in gratitude. And especially as we see the signs.

But know this, too: quietness and silence are not the same thing. Quietness does speak. Yes, actions speak louder than words, but sometimes words are needed, too. Quietness speaks not attention-seeking words of self-recognition, but words of encouragement, words of forgiveness. Quietness sings and prays. Quietness speaks of Christ. Quietness is happy to listen, quick to hear, slow to speak, and doesn't need to set the world on fire. **Because quietness is confident the Lord will act and fulfill His Word.**

This quietness was Christ's, and so it's yours, too. Jesus was quiet when satan taunted Him in the wilderness, yet used God's Word to fight. He was quiet in the face of many accusers and when they condemned Him to the cross, yet also prayed for His mockers' and crucifiers' forgiveness. Jesus didn't have to shout down those who shouted Him down. Quietness is confident. It is loudness, brashness, babbling, gossiping that is not confident; that is nervous and anxious and needs to be heard and seen. Christ, in His quietness, looked only to God for vindication and life, and He was not put to shame. In quietness, He was raised on the third day.

This quietness of Christ's is your quietness now. His confidence your confidence. In the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for you. That no matter how messed up this world is or becomes, you have a God above it all. No matter how close to the end we are, you have a Saviour and a promised future in Him. That no matter what each day brings, it brings with it the love of Your Father, the forgiveness of your Saviour, and the strength of the Spirit. ***The Lord is faithful. His Word endures forever.*** When there's nothing in this world you can count on, you can count on that.

So until that day, when the ***Son of Man [comes] in a cloud with power and great glory***, live in quiet confidence. Don't give up on your Saviour who does not give up on you. Who bore your burdens, and still does. That in His strength and love and grace and mercy, we can bear one another's burdens, in our families, our churches, our neighborhoods. Not for the world's acclaim or applause - that's unlikely anyway. But because you have a Father who sees in secret, and a Saviour in whose nail-scarred hands your life is safe and secure. And when He does appear, He who rescued you, who established you and guarded you in this world and life - and He is! - you will meet Him, as Malachi said, like calves leaping from the stall, and He will take you up with Himself,

to the life and glory He has for you and all His children. He is steadfast and faithful, and will surely do it. So as we wait, do not fear. Do not be anxious. Yes, *The Day Is Surely Drawing Near* (LSB #508). So *Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers* (LSB #515)! You beloved of the Lord. Rejoice and pray: *Come, Lord Jesus!*

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.