

Populus Zion (2nd Sunday in Advent): December 5th 2021

“You Did This To Me!”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I read through the Gospel text from Luke today, it’s hard not to think about Jesus’ words, “*These are but the beginning of the birth pains.*”¹ As Jesus talks about the end of the world, He uses the illustration of birth. Every parent knows that pain. Mother’s know it first-hand of course, and fathers have to suffer by watching on the sidelines being in panic and not being able to help. Even those who have not been blessed with the gift of children can empathize. When the birth pains start, and labor grinds on, the pain intensifies exponentially, causing some to rely on modern medicine to dull the pain, and others resort to screaming at their loving husband, “You did this to me!”

What does birth pains have to do with our text for today? Our text from Luke is in a large section of Jesus’ teaching on the end times. Portions of this teaching are also found in Matthew. When you put these longer sermons of Jesus together, you get quite the picture, and great words of comfort and admonition. As Jesus prepares for His crucifixion, He is preparing His disciples for their own deaths. He informs them all that they need to be safe from the wrath that is to be revealed.

In order to prepare them for the birth pains, He gives them an eschatological Lamaze class; that is, He teaches them what to focus on as the end time approaches, as well as, giving them exercises to engage in during these labor pains. In this class, Jesus gives 5 words. Now, this is not just simply 5 small words; NO, this is words in the Hebrew sense. For example, in English, we say “The Ten Commandments,” but the literal speaking of the Hebrew language says, “The Ten Words”; that is the 10 phrases or sentences. They are commands, teachings, that with just a few words, one can peel back layers and layers of God’s precious word. It is a collective noun, like the royal “we”, or “Word to your mother.”

¹ Matthew 24:8

Jesus first says, “***Straighten up and raise your heads.***”² The weight of sin and sorrow causes man to stoop low. The posture of the downtrodden, the hopeless, and the time-weathering of sin causes man to crouch and bend down. This is not the kind of bending Jesus talks about here. The bending here is in fear. At the great and awesome day of the Lord, as the Labor pains intensify, there will be earthquakes, the sea and the waves will roar, the sun and moon will lose their light, the stars will fall from heaven, the air will be full of poison and pestilence, unprecedented and unusual disease will appear, water and fire will devastate the land and people, there will be great storms of thunder, lightning, rain, and wind. There will be war, bloodshed, rioting, rebellion, and men will devote themselves to excess eating, excess drinking, and everything that pertains to their temporal, earthly joy and pleasure. They will care most deeply for luxury and their own livelihood, just as an animal caught in a snare. The animal seeks to fill its belly, and in an instant is caught in peril.

The unbeliever, when they see the signs and wonders of the end of the age, will cower in fear. They will, like Adam, attempt to hide from God. As these labor pains worsen, we see this all too often, do we not? A man struck down at a young age, while they had so much life yet to live. A woman, taken by an illness at an age too young for her short life. A disease that doctors have no idea what yet to do to cure, so they fall to merely treating the symptoms. The unbeliever will tremble and shrink at the Judgement of God, as they will see an angry Judge above them, the jaws of hell beneath them, their own sins to their right, the accuser on their left, and their evil conscience within them.

What is different then for the believer? The brokenness of the world and the body still is true for them. The temptations to serve the self over everyone else still remains; so, what is different? As these things happen in the heavens and the earth, Jesus exhorts to “***straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.***”³ For the believer, the end of the world is not a reason for fear; rather, it is a reason to stand tall and to look up to the heavens. The believer looks not to themselves, they look to the Eternal One, with whom eternal life is given and lived for eternity.

² Luke 21:28

³ Luke 21:28

Second Jesus says, “***Look...and know.***”⁴ Look at the Fig Tree. When you see things happening, you know exactly what is going on. When you see the leaves of the fig tree coming out, you know that summer is already near. In the same way, look at the signs, see what is happening, look with the eyes of faith, and know what God is doing. You see the end times upon you, you know it is God who is working for your good. You have heard what the pains are like. You know what to expect, do not be surprised when labor starts. Instead, be informed, see what God’s Word declares is happening. You are prepared.

As you look, as you know, cling ever tightly to the third word of Jesus, “***Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.***”⁵ All of creation will come to an end. The time is set and known only by God. There is one thing that is everlasting. One thing that will not pass away. One thing that endures forever and ever: the Word of God! How blessed are we His children to be washed in that Word. That Word who became flesh, lived the perfect obedience in our place, suffered and died for us. That Word could not be silenced. He rose victoriously on the Third Day and He is preached to the ends of the earth.

This enduring word joins you to Himself, as He joins His word to simple water. Through this holy and sacred act, you are given everlasting life. You are bestowed with love and grace abounding. You are declared an eternal heir of all the spiritual blessings Christ has won for you. You are reconciled with God the Father, and you suffer not the wrath of God; rather you suffer His mercy, love, and grace.

How wonderful is this Word who continues to speak to us, even now, His children? We fall away. We run away. We turn to other means of self-satisfaction. We flee to instant gratification. And God, in His long-suffering, sends suffering and turmoil. He sends various testing of our faith. Reminders that we are poor miserable sinners who need to rely solely on His grace. Inevitably the questions always come to the depth and the specifics of our brokenness and struggles of body, soul, possessions, and reputations. As the pain intensifies and the labor increases, do we not turn into stereotypical television pregnant ladies, “You did this to me!”?

⁴ Luke 21:29-30

⁵ Luke 21:33

It is here, precisely here, as His beloved bride, as His infant children, where it is vitally important that we hear His voice. We hear His word. We remember that we have received that word in baptism. We hear and receive that creative word that gives what it says. Then, brothers and sisters, fellow children of the Most High God, this enduring, everlasting Word is joined to bread and wine for you! The only-Begotten Son of God, our brother, has been through every struggle of body and soul, possessions and reputation. He bore the punishment and the eternal brokenness for them to the cross. It was not for His sins He died. It was not for His brokenness that He suffered. He had every right to look upon the cross at each of us and say, “You did this to me!”

Yet, He didn’t. He silently bore the accusations and the blows, the mocking and the nails. He did cry from the cross; but He cried for you. He was forsaken by God, so you never are. He cried the payment for sin is finished. He cried for your forgiveness, because like infants, you don’t know what you are doing. He cried that you be given to your mother. He cried that here through blood and water you receive His victory won on the cross. He cried in thirst to drink the cup of God’s wrath, so that you will only drink the cup of the New Covenant, His blood poured for you, here through this chalice.

These loving cries awake us to the fourth word of our text, “*Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.*”⁶ The church as a loving mother, must constantly be on guard for her children. As a loved bride, she must be ever vigilant against the temptation to not be solely concerned with the filling of temporal, fleeting happiness. We are to avoid the very things that can cloud our awareness of His return. We are to beware to always keep watch, so we do not fall into the trap. While we fill our bellies, our minds, our hearts, our desires, beware that they are not a snare, designed to keep us in its very clutches and away from the tasks of God.

⁶ Luke 21:34

This leads us to the final word of Jesus in our text, ***“But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”***⁷ Watching and being awake means having a fervent, burning, living and active faith. It is active in love. It keeps its eyes on God. It keeps its ears in His Word. It keeps His body and His blood ever its mouth. It keeps its hands and feet simply outpouring in holy, loving works.

2 Corinthians reminds, ***“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive according as he has done in the life of the body, be it good or evil.”***⁸ Yes, faith is an invisible thing, so God will judge the heart by what we can see and touch, namely, man’s works, good or evil.

“Now, hold on a minute pastor,” you are asking. “Am I to understand that God will judge by works?” Yes, it is according to His own decree in Matthew 25. When the King separates the sheep and the goats, He will look at what they have done to the least of their brothers.

“But pastor, why does He want to hold a trial? Doesn’t He already know ahead of time where we are going?” Yes, but as the just judge, He does not wish to render judgment in secret or privately; rather, He judges publicly before the world, angels and demons, either to save or to condemn men by their own works as a testimony to their faith, or lack thereof. On that Last Day, He will not ask, “Are you Christian?” He will ask, “If you are a Christian, point to your Christian works by which you have proven your faith. Have you fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, housed the poor, comforted the afflicted, and visited the sick and captives, or have you kept these precious gifts I gave you only to serve yourself?”

⁷ Luke 21:36

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:10

“But pastor,” I can hear you ask, “Does Christ take all that much pleasure in such works?” Yes! In Matthew He says, “*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*”⁹ Hear me correctly here, brothers and sisters in Christ, your works do not save you; your works show that you are saved!

Saved in baptism, strengthened in absolution and preaching, and fed by the body and blood our Lord in Holy Communion sets the tone and tenor for our week. It is the structure that governs our lives. As we gather to watch, hear, listen, and receive, we are filled with His grace. We receive His life and proclaim His death until He comes. Here we come and receive the epidural that not only dulls the pain for a time, but removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. Here we turn to our Heavenly Bridegroom and in exuberant joy exclaim, “You did this to me!” Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁹ Matthew 25:40

Prayer of the Church
Second Sunday in Advent (Populus Zion)
5 December 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Eternal God, Your Word has been sent forth into the world to the joy and edification of Your holy people. Encourage, comfort and strengthen all who hear it. Grant faith to those who do not know You, both here and abroad, that all peoples may sing to Your name and extol Your goodness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, fill all who hear Your Word with all joy and peace in believing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You reveal to us that this world is distressed by the curse of sin and vulnerable to trouble and disaster, yet You have given Your Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. Guard our hearts against fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, and instead strengthen our faith that Christ is coming again in glory. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You know we often use the cares of this life as excuses for dissipation, drunkenness and other distractions from You and Your promises. Guard us from all temptations that would harm our faith and lead us to fear Your coming. Preserve us by Your grace, that we might wait with joy to stand before the Son of Man in glory. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the midst of strife and conflict, and wars and rumors of wars, remind us that You have given all authority in heaven and earth to Your Son, our ascended Lord. Call to faithfulness the leaders of the earth, and bless those who govern. Thwart those who would hinder Your reign among all peoples, that peace may be established in all places. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Gabe, Gavin, and Marinna* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, to our prayers *especially for Carmen, Marvin, Chris, Pam, Zoey, and those we name in our hearts.* Give healing, courage and perseverance to all who cry to You, that they may find comfort in Your enduring Word and the certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life with Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, fill us with all joy and peace in believing. Grant repentance and firm trust to all who commune this day, that receiving Your true body and blood, they may be forgiven and abound in hope, able to stand with a clean conscience before Your judgment throne. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of comfort, show the love of Your Christ to all troubled consciences. Lift up their heads to see that their redemption is drawing near, and bless them through the preaching of the Gospel. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**