



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Today is the second last Sunday in the church year. Since Pentecost, we have been studying the teachings of Jesus, his life, and his actions. Since we are coming to the end of the church year, it is not unusual that we hear our Gospel talk about the end of time. We hear Jesus instructing his followers on how to be ready for that last day, that will surely come.

For some this is quite an uncomfortable reading. I suspect that most of us do not spend a lot of time pondering the end of time, when and how the end of the earth might come to pass. Thus, it may be uncomfortable and unsettling to hear Jesus devote what precious little time He has left, preparing His disciples for the end times. We would much prefer to listen to Jesus as He tells his parables about how we should live.

Am I right? Just how much time did you spend this week reflecting on the end of time? And why aren't we more concerned about it? Or are we?

When I first came to Park Falls, I clearly remember one of my closest friends telling me about a documentary she watched about the Apocalypse. The program talked all about how the world was going to end in 2020. She cited some reasons why the show's producer and narrator thought that world would end and what we would see before that time. When she finished telling me the details, she could remember, I asked if she really believed all that she told me. She replied, why not? Because what does it matter anyway?"

Well, I think it does matter. But unless we have a reason to think about it, we don't seem to grasp the importance or significance of the end of time.

In fact, we usually spend way more time thinking about the Good Ol' days. We actually yearn for those days to return. Days when we did not have to lock our homes when we went away. Days when our children could play outside all day long and mom didn't worry about us being abducted. Days when there were Sunday family dinners at grandmas and grandpas house, after church because the stores were not open on Sunday. Days where arguments in school were over soon after they began, and no one brought a gun to school to settle the score. Ah the good old days!

But 9/11 took away some of our feelings of security and safety. Columbine high school shooting made us question the safety of our children in school. Amber alerts and child molestation cases in the news reminded us that children are targets. And gone are the days of Sunday being a day for family, food, and of course Packer football, because our commercial economy drags us out of the house to get our shopping done, only 37 days left until Christmas. We may live in a bit more sheltered world, up in the Northwoods where we might still leave our car doors unlocked in the Super One parking lot, but there are still drugs and alcohol in our schools and a massive dose of pornography on the internet. And speaking of internet, if you don't have your holiday shopping done, you can shop online Black Friday through Cyber Monday.

We do live in a broken and sin filled world. But as Christians we are challenged to live as people of faith in this world such that it is. Not trying to recreate those Good Old Days, but looking forward to when Christ will come again and all the evil in the world will be destroyed once and for all.

Our reading in the Gospel this morning talks about what will happen before that time comes. Our reading in Daniel talks of the resurrection of the dead. Psalm 16 is a prophesy of Jesus' resurrection and how that will define the world in which we live. And the writer of our Hebrews text warns us that we are to hold fast to the faith. Verse 24 says, "provoke one another to love and good deeds." And the Mark gospel reading warns us that we are to beware that no one leads us astray. False prophets will come but we are to take heed.

The setting for our Gospel reading today is the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed in 587 BCE by the Babylonians. They sent the Jews to live in exile, but the Jews never stopped dreaming of returning to the Promised Land. Many years later, the Jews were allowed to return and with their return came the desire to rebuild the temple. Some of the disciples are impressed with the new temple that Herod the Great started to build. It was larger than any previous temple and certainly one of the most impressive structures in all of Jerusalem. And to the Jews, the temple was a sign of God's presence with Israel. The temple was Israel's connection point with God and also a symbol of their identity as God's people. And now Jesus is telling them that one day this mighty building will fall to rubble, again. Not one stone will remain set on another. The world as the disciples knew it, their good o'days, according to Jesus, was going to come to an end.

It was almost inconceivable that such a thing could happen. The Temple was huge, built as a fortress and the holy of holies reside inside. It was a place where God dwelt among men. Certainly, it would be protected. It was almost blasphemy that Jesus would say such a thing.

The Jews would surely feel a huge sense of loss if their temple were destroyed again. In fact, in 70 CE that Temple was destroyed in retaliation to the Jewish revolt. The Roman army attached Jerusalem and burnt the Temple down.

But I think here in this Gospel lesson, Jesus is talking about more than just a magnificent building. He goes past talking about the temple destruction to talk about the end of all time. After all God created the earth in the beginning of time so the end of time would also fall under His jurisdiction. All time is included in God's reign, even the end of time.

The disciples ask Jesus to tell them the signs that will precede the end times. They believe that if they know the future, they will be able to deal with it. The present might be uncertain, but if the future is assured, they can live with that uncertainty. Things were not that wonderful for the

disciples either. They were often questioned about their beliefs and as we know many of the followers of Jesus were persecuted for their faith in Jesus and were killed by the unbelievers.

And even though we live in a free country and are not persecuted for our faith, we are not too different than the disciples; we want to know our future. And many people have taken advantage of us, exploiting that desire. Tim LaHaye with his "Left Behind Series" and Hal Lindsey with his Book, The Late Great Planet Earth have demonstrated that a person can grow rich spouting their ideas about what the future will be like. Gullible as we are we look to the stars. How many of you have read your horoscopes lately? We look into crystal balls; we have our tarot cards or have our palms read to get a jump on the future.

Jesus goes on to explain that there are signs to watch for, signs of the end of time, actually 3 of them in today's reading:

1st There will be people who falsely come in the name of Jesus. v 5-6

2ⁿ There will be wars and insurrections. v7-8

3rd And the earth will experience earthquakes, and famines. v8

Jesus talks about these three things to the disciples and to us. We have seen wars in the world, insurrections in our own country, and many famines and earthquakes. But I think that the most important thing that we need to hear is that we should not be fooled by false prophets as we wait for Christ's triumphant return. Because it is the false prophets that are the ones talking about what will happen at the end of the world. It is the false prophet that wants to scare us into believing something other than what Jesus wants for us. Believing those false prophets is dangerous and it is only trusting in a God who holds the future in his hands that is paramount. We need to continue in the faith.

There are many smart people in the world that prophesy about all kinds of things. Here are some examples:

Frank Knox, US Secretary of the Navy, on Dec 4, 1941, said, "Whatever happens, the US Navy is not going to be caught napping."

Economist Irving Fisher on October 16, 1929 said, "Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."

Thomas Watson, IBM chairman in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

Decca Records, rejecting a request for a recording contract with a group called the Beatles in 1962 said, "We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out."

How wrong all those folks were and they weren't trying to sell you a better extended car warranty or the best medical advantage plan.

So here we are 2000 years later, and we still tend to listen to those who have no faith as they speak loudly with the devil on their side about the end times. Our true faith does not believe that God will make our lives comfortable and affluent. But our faith knows that whatever situations we face, God will be with us through those situations. And it will be in God's time that Jesus will return to extinguish the devil forever. Believe and trust that!

In confirmation recently we talked about what faith really is. It is a hard concept to instill in the young and often adults too. Faith is basically trust. We trust in the promises of God. And then we live our lives knowing that those promises will come true. And so, we have heard that Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead, as our creed proclaims. We trust that and so we wait. But we wait as people who believe that will be true.

And so, what do we do in the meantime? We just need to continue in the faith. And true faith is not worrying about the future. Jesus Christ died on the cross to secure our future for us. We are sure of that promise of forgiveness and eternal life. We live a life of faith and that is what we should be concerned about. And because we follow Christ, we are concerned with the needs of others today. Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself!

As we wait for Christ to come again, we have the time to show others about God's love. We can witness to others about how faith in the promise of God's love gives us a better life here on earth. We invite others to come to Christ so that they too can experience the heaven on earth we know. God's kingdom right here and right now.

When asked what he would do if he knew that the world was going to end the next day, Martin Luther replied that he would go out and plant an apple tree. At first this might seem like a strange reply. The idea that Luther was trying to express is that he would live his life of faith exactly the same way whether the end was twenty years away or tomorrow.

So instead of trusting false prophets we should look to Luther and follow his example of living out a faith filled life each and every day. For we never know if this is our last day or not. However, we can be assured that no matter whether it is or not, God will be with us.

Today we have an opportunity to tell the world who our Savior is. The words we will use need not be memorized, as Jesus will give us the right words to say. The Holy Spirit will fill us with words and wisdom. We need only to accept this opportunity with an open heart.

And remember even though we have these three things that Jesus told us will happen before the end of time, no one knows when that will be. Not you, not me, and certainly not the writers of the TV program my friend was watching. Only God knows. So don't be afraid of Christ's return. Our readings today are not scary apocalyptic messages of doom and gloom. But rather they are a collective message of anticipation and hope. They show us that there is plan for all of creation. A plan for a loving God to come again to destroy evil.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Life is uncertain, eat your dessert first"? Or about the lady who wanted to be buried with her fork? She believed what she learned from many a meal when she was told to keep your fork as the best is yet to come.

We know deep in our hearts that life is not uncertain, and it is true that the best is yet to come!

God created life and gave it to us as a gift. He wants us to make the most of the abundant life here on earth. Because of His gift of grace and His great love for us he wants us to be ready. Ready for the end of time. Ready to meet Him face to face. AMEN