

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), B – Last Sunday before Advent (Proper 29), November 21st, 2021

Be Ready to Be Taken Home

Mark 13:24-37

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

This time of year brings out the best images in our minds of hearth and home. Home is a place of rest, peace, warmth on a cool Fall day. The home is where just about all of our First Article gifts flow through, all of those things for which God richly and daily provides without any merit or worthiness in us: clothing, shoes, food, drink, family, animals, and all things you have.

When I was a child, I recall many times right around this time of year where I brought this or that to school that were just random things from the grocery store that teachers asked us to bring to package together to send overseas to our military. They told me it was so that they can have remembrances of home while they served abroad. That is, you don't realize the value of a warm toasted pop-tart like you had growing up until you're halfway across the world from one. And everyone can relate to the joyful experience of simply coming home after a long day or a long trip. Home, as the old proverb goes, is where the heart is. Home is where we find stability, where things tend to be the same just enough for us to find peace; peace knowing what is where and how things work. I find this is especially true when children aren't quite themselves at home when a thing like a big Thanksgiving party or even just one person or circumstance is different, when something unfamiliar enters their most familiar environment.

It would seem then, at least at first, that this theme for the Last weekend of the Church year pushes against the joys of home. It's all about change. It's all about leaving our homes here on earth to a new state of existence. Jesus is talking about the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light. Stars aren't meant to fall from heaven, nor the skies shake. And when the Son of

Man comes in clouds with great power and glory and his angels gather us from the four corners of the earth, He's taking us away from our hearth and home of this life.

But the picture of the Scriptures for those in Christ is that this Day is not one of fear for a coming change, that you're leaving your home to a new place of unfamiliarity. No, the picture instead is that the Last Day is the day that we finally get to go home. This life is one big unpleasant vacation.

In fact, if we're really being honest, it's good to give thanks for the good things I've spoken of about hearth and home and the stability and comfort there, but our homes are also often places of great anguish, even at seemingly no fault of our own. Just picture your own bed and the sleepless battles you've had against all sorts of afflictions. Or the fights...or the frustrations of things that just – keep – breaking. And when we get to that final home after this long tiresome journey on this earth, we shall rest. The experience of resting in your own home after a long week of traversing the Midwest...times eternity. No more things breaking. No more fighting. No more constant change. No more hunger, thirst, hurt, or tears. Peace, and peace eternal. Rest in Jesus.

But the journey back to our true home is like a special train coming on a special day on a special time. The schedule's not published, so you need to be on the platform ready to go when that train comes. Which is to say, stay awake, as Jesus says. Watch for the train that takes you home. You're not going to want to miss it.

But it's tiring to stay awake, even for the things we anticipate most that require us to stay up late in the night. We get tired in this life of fighting against satan and our sin, tired of doing good for the least of those among us, tired of hoping day after day after day for Jesus to return again, for our Master to return on the train that will then take us home where we can finally rest.

And so perhaps we just go with the flow for a time, a little spiritual nap here, a little spiritual nap there. Or just simply distract yourself with busy-ness and worldly pleasures, acting as though *this* world is our actual home, and so we can make it not so bad after all if we just dedicate ourselves to it and try our hardest.

In light of our frequent spiritual slumbers, we recognize the good of being woken up by drastic changes in our lives. When we are brought to our senses to remember the daily battles on this side of the Resurrection and the Last Day, we are impelled to turn back to our hope, our Savior, in repentance and faith, and the sweet words of comfort in our Gospel today: **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”**

This is an amazing reminder. Just think on everything in our world that we wake up and just simply expect to be there as they were the day before: the sun rising, our art on the wall, your daily breakfast routine, the news on the TV or computer or phone, your coffee, your commute, your favorite spot in town to be, all of it will pass away, except for two things: the (1) Word of God, and (2) those who hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Isaiah says **“the heavens [will] vanish like smoke, [and] the earth will wear out like a garment.”** But Jesus’ words will not pass away. The Word of the Lord endures forever, and you who love that word, who follow the voice of the Good Shepherd, will also endure forever, which makes the words of God the most priceless treasure on this fading earth.

And so while the devil and all his angels are merely awaiting their own final destruction and their final casting into the eternal fire, their number one goal as they prowl around this world is to try and silence this Word, to silence Jesus. But Jesus, the Word made flesh, cannot be silenced. The evil one tried to silence the incarnate Word through the death of the cross, but that silence could not last. And in Satan’s attempt to silence God on the cross, the result was the

Word of God sounding forth to all creation, the Word speaking promises of redemption to the people of old, the sounding forth to us today of what has happened and what will happen. The Word of God can never be silenced, and carries all power and authority and might, power to cleanse lepers, forgive sins, give hope, and power to raise the dead.

For when Jesus fell silent on the cross, when life vanished from He who created life, He changed that cross from a tool of death and silence to a divine megaphone that proclaims life and love and mercy to all people everywhere. On the cross, **“God set His justice as a light to the peoples,”** as Isaiah says. In Jesus, the silence and darkness gave way to light and joyous eternal communication. Fellowship. Unity...in the bond of peace. While the sun of this earth is darkened, the eternal light of Christ shines into the night and into all the future, a light to all peoples who would cast off the darkness and enter into the light. <pause>

The cross, then, silences Satan and all his accusations, and on the third day and ever since that great Easter morn, Jesus accompanies you whenever the devil comes round. He accompanies you with His words given in days of old, made real today, just as alive and real as Jesus is alive and real today. These words of forgiveness, of blessing, of life, are words that you take up as your weapon in the battles of this life as you await the blessed homecoming once the war is finally over. The battles of this earthly life are many, and they're tough as nails, and you yourself often suffer even from others by way of friendly fire. But as wounded and tired as you and your brothers in arms may be, it's to you that Jesus has appeared. It's to you that Jesus took on the nails, and to you He appears again and again to speak peace through His ministry. Peace be with you. Not as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; Jesus has overcome the world.

And the Day will come, the day in which your redemption draws near, when the last enemy of death shall be destroyed, and all you see around you except your fellow Christians hearing the eternal Word of God; all you see otherwise will burn away in flames. Every little security blanket will give way to your Good Shepherd.

Stay awake. Watch for the train. Jesus didn't tell us the day nor the hour, so it'll come at a time you least expect. Keep in the Word, and Word will keep you. And have no fear, for you have the treasures of heaven now by faith, and your redemption by sight draws near. He is with you on this journey, He will soon take you home, to your everlasting hearth and home.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.