

Populus Zion
10 December, Anno Domini 2017
St. Luke 21:25-36
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We aren't going to save the world. It is not the duty of the Church to make a civil society or even a Christian nation. It is ours to cling to the One who has drawn us up out of death until the day of final deliverance. The fact of the matter is that since Adam and Eve rejected the Word of God, the world has been on a continual slide into absolute chaos. Entropy is the rule of the day, contrary to those who believe that we are developing and getting better, smarter, and more evolved. Most of the so-called advancements (for which I am thankful in many ways) seem to inevitably bring with them greater arrogance on our part and a further rejection of the things of God. The ability to do something is conflated with the rightness of doing the thing. The devil is the master of using our own knowledge against us to destroy us and draw us away from our Creator.

Sin and death can have only one direction - complete and utter breakdown. I know a lot of us in conversation are sure we know what needs to happen in order to turn things around and make things better. Usually it involves political scheming - electing the right individuals or passing the right pieces of legislation. The case of the cake baker that is now before the Supreme Court bears with it the hopes and fears of many. "If they get this one right, we're saved. If they get it wrong, all is lost." There are so many new medical developments that promise to unlock the secrets of health and longevity. And who among us isn't constantly lamenting because we just can't do the things that we are sure will make us better? It can become easy to think that that is what church is about too - teaching us the plans and steps to do and be better - a better life, better community, better attitude, etc. Take your plans, add a dash of Jesus, and viola! But the reality is, things aren't going to get better. Period. They are only going to get worse.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news or to sound like Debbie Downer, but we can give up this chasing after better. Jesus Himself has told us that everything about the creation is falling apart, it's groaning under the weight of sin. And Jesus expects us to recognize that. It should be as obvious to

us as the budding trees in the Spring. And those signs are everywhere. Nations like North Korea and Iran, run by despotic madmen, are bent on getting nuclear weapons in order to destroy their neighbors or us. Droughts, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and famines are everywhere and at least feel like they are happening more and more and getting more devastating. People are filled with anxiety and anger and are turning against one another, often in very hateful and violent ways. Wickedness is running rampant and is even praised. And who knows how much longer we will enjoy the unique freedom in this country to freely worship and confess the Lord according to the truth of Scripture? The social pressures are already building, working every possible avenue to push any expression of Biblical Christianity underground. Heaven and earth are going to pass away - and yes, man is to blame because man brought sin into this world.

And this presents a real challenge to Christ's children. Since Christ's return is nearer now than when we first believed, the temptations and pressures to compromise and even reject the Word of God continue to build day by day. We dare not make light of Jesus' unequivocal warning in today's Gospel that we must always watch ourselves. We aren't immune. We aren't above the dangers. We aren't stronger or smarter than the devil. We are all antinomians at heart. Our sinful flesh would have us turn our Christian freedom into license or believe that as a Christian sinful living can't really hurt us. But that is foolish and deadly thinking. The ways of the world are sinful and always have one purpose - to lure us away from the things of Christ which is to lure us away from Christ Himself. Sin kills.

Christ places Himself in our midst for this very reason. The world is filled with lies and dangers. Our flesh is deceitful and confuses good with evil so that suddenly there are Christian preachers who preach exactly what the world is preaching and calling the teachings of the Scriptures and the Church evil. If the light of God's Word, the truth that He has revealed in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, is not shining forth, there can only be darkness and the day of Christ's return will come like a thief and find us unprepared. The only truth there is is the truth that Christ speaks. And that truth is contrary to what the world calls wisdom and truth. The wisdom of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. It was in the days of Noah. It was in the day of Christ. And it still is now. But it is still the truth. God the Father has given His only-begotten Son to save us from sin. He alone is our hope and our salvation.

Being weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life are evil and dangerous. They always have been and always will be. We can't pretend otherwise. The world cares about image and power and the opinions of men and the great idol of "I". You, children of God, are not to concern yourselves with such things. And daily we must examine ourselves in light of God's clear and true Word - our hearts, our desires, the entertainment we choose, the relationships we foster, the things we choose to spend our and our families' time on. Are we praying for daily bread and then use what God has given us to fill our family's lives with as much of the world's stuff as we can? Are we praying that God's kingdom would come while day after day goes by and the Word of God isn't heard in our home? Do we pray that God's name would be kept holy among us and then gossip about our neighbor, watch television and listen to music that praises and fills our hearts and minds with the very evil that God abhors? Let us repent and seek the Lord's mercy and fight daily against the sinful flesh that remains.

I don't say these things to you to cause you to despair. You don't need to. Christ Jesus has overcome the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. As much as it thrashes about and screams and rages in the midst of the throes of death, it is all just an empty show meant to cause you to falter and despair. Satan knows he's been defeated but he is on a mission every day to convince you otherwise. Even though the heavens and the earth will pass away, Christ's will not nor will His promise to you, the redeemed and baptized of God. In fact, Jesus tells us to lift up our heads when we see the tribulations growing around us because that can mean only one thing - the hope of our salvation is near! Having been rescued from sin and death, the Christian longs for the day when Christ returns because that is the day of our eternal freedom! On that day, all temptation will cease, our bodies will be changed and every brokenness of sin will be healed, the great tormentor and murderer of souls will be cast forever into the fiery furnace of hell where he will never threaten the baptized again.

But that day is not yet upon us. We must for a time continue to live and endure the sinful world. The times are evil and they are dangerous. They are fraught with very real dangers to you and to your family. Pray. Cry out to God that He would give you strength to resist because you aren't strong enough on your own. Pray that you can make the difficult decisions that will make you an outcast in this world because of the hope you have in Jesus Christ. And your heavenly Father will hear you and answer you.

And He has already provided you with the armor and artillery you need to survive - His Word and Holy Sacraments. The Gospel of Christ which promises life and salvation is the promise of God to deliver you from this world and from the death into which it is spiraling. Your Baptism shields you from the accusations of Satan and grants to you the Holy Spirit who has given you a new will with new desires to live according to Christ's Word and He strengthens you to fight in the hour of temptation. God raises up His ministers among you and promises that He has placed His Word of forgiveness on their lips for you. And as you come and feast on the Body and the Blood of Holy Communion you proclaim the Lord's death for sin and remember that these were given for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

You will stumble and fall. Your flesh is weak. That is why we need the mercy that Christ freely offers and desires us to have. Without it, without Him, we cannot be and remain prepared. And that is also why we need to remain in constant prayer, that God would strengthen us and deliver us, that He would preserve the Means of Grace for us. That by His Holy Spirit, God would cause His will to be done in us and through us and that our sinful will would be denied at every turn. Trying to survive the tumult of the end of the ages without continually receiving the Means of Grace and without calling upon God for aid is like walking onto the battlefield with no weapons and no armor. You will lose. You will die. These things aren't given to you in vain. Christ doesn't give gifts that you don't absolutely need. To despise them is to despise the One who gives them. And He won them for you at the cost of shedding His Blood on the cross.

Things are getting worse, just as Jesus said. But Jesus also promised that He would return and deliver us. Dear Christians, straighten up your heads because your Lord is approaching to snatch us all away from Satan's jaws. And indeed He draws near to you now veiled under Word, water, bread, and wine to bind up the wounds you have suffered and to strengthen you for the battle that lies ahead. God grant to each of us faithfulness and steadfastness of faith that when He returns He will find each of us and the whole Christian Church on earth in prayerful expectation of our eternal deliverance.

In the Name of +Jesus.