

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity  
10 November, Anno Domini 2019  
St. Matthew 24:15-28  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

THE day, the day when when the angel trumpet will blast, the day when Jesus will return on the clouds, the day when the faith of the Baptized will be vindicated, the day when the sick and sinful world will see its Redeemer - that day is coming and it is closer now than it ever has been. On that day all doubt and unbelief will be removed. All mockers will be silenced. The hour of judgment will break in on all of creation like a lightning bolt - suddenly and obviously. No one will be confused or unsure about what is happening. All eyes will behold Jesus and recognize Him - some to their great joy, others to their great and eternal sorrow. Every earthly prop will give way. Every idol of men's hearts will be consumed. On that day, the promises of your Baptism will be completely fulfilled. No more waiting. No more wondering. On that day, beloved children of the Lord, your tears and frustrations, your heartache and guilt will all be swept away and your hearts will begin their uninterrupted eternity of rest in Jesus.

Until that day, however, we are covered in thick darkness. Death consumes now one and then another. Our Lord describes a time of terrible tribulation when the temple and the holy city would be completely and utterly devastated. Three years of horror from 67-70 AD as the Romans besieged the city of David, drove its inhabitants to starvation, and finally ripped it down stone by stone until not one was left standing on another. And things haven't gotten any better. They won't. Jesus warned us. The signs of the end are all over the place and they seem to be getting more and more frequent and intense. Wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes.

Those things are bad enough. But even more gut-wrenching is the skyrocketing rate at which people are turning against and killing one another. Any more we almost expect to hear about another mass killing when we wake up. Preborn babies are ripped violently from their mothers wombs and we're told its healthcare. We are constantly either at war or on the brink of war with some other nation or nations around us are at war. People say the most vile things about one another, threatening to take reputations and lives. Sexual abuse and perversion are cool and modesty and chastity are considered slavery. Apostasy is on the rise as false teachers hang up their shingles and promise to scratch itching ears. People are

falling away from the faith in droves because the Word of God is despised and ignored even by those who call themselves Christians. Churches everywhere struggle to survive as people's attention and resources and priorities are drawn elsewhere. The persecution of Christians continues to escalate as the devil inflames the world's hatred of God's righteousness and the word of truth. Bad, dishonest science is being used to lead people away from their loving Creator who knit them purposely together in their mother's womb, to the imaginary and impersonal idols of time and random chance.

To be sure, ever since the Fall, sin and death have caused chaos and destruction. Read any history and you'll quickly see that humanity has been a dumpster fire of hatred and selfishness and rebellion ever since Adam bought the devil's lie and lit the match that started the blaze. That being said, things are getting worse as sin continues to further darken men's minds, turning them further and further in on themselves and against God and their neighbor.

This is exactly why Jesus tells us beforehand. He isn't speaking in hyperbole just to make a point. He is preparing us for what is coming because He loves you and wants you to persevere, to keep your attention focused on the right things and not be lulled to sleep and caught unprepared when He returns. The false christs and the false prophets are everywhere looking to take advantage of those who do not keep their lamps trimmed and their senses sharp, those who do not daily study and meditate on the Word of God, those who believe they can remain strong and ready without the Means of Grace. As the devil's time winds down, he is growing increasingly more desperate and vicious. He is far more cunning than we are. He slathers his lies in candy so that they are hard to recognize. They taste good but they kill you. Jesus doesn't warn in vain. The danger to each of us real.

We are in the last days, as we have been since Christ ascended into heaven. It's been roughly 730,000 days and so it is easy to forget, easy to grow complacent and imagine that Christ isn't going to return, at least during our life time. But remember, a thousand years is like a day and a day like a thousand years to the Lord. He is not slow as some count slowness. Pay attention to the signs! They are all around you. The chaos and despair that you see and hear on a daily basis should cause you to remember and perk up your apocalyptic ears. "Jesus has talked about this. I know what all this means. Jesus is coming back and I need to be prepared. I need to be found in faith, not trusting in the stubble of my own works or righteousness but only in the Blood of Jesus and the forgiveness that He proclaims." These signs should drive you to prayer that the Lord would stir up attentiveness and readiness at every hour of every day. They should drive you

search the Scriptures so that you are armed against the lies and deceptions that are being transmitted from pulpits and televisions and podcasts and radios. They should drive you to test not only the spirits but yourself. Discipline your mind and your flesh so that they do not rule over you and drag you away from Christ down the broad and easy road that leads to your destruction. Look at what happened to the Israelites who grew impatient with Moses' return from Mt. Sinai. They gave up the faith, not trusting the Word but themselves. And so they fashioned gods of their own choosing and indulged the perverse desires of their flesh as worship of their gods. In so doing, in breaking the First Commandment, they provoked the Lord God to wrath such that He would have destroyed them for their idolatry and debauchery.

Christ has not left it a mystery how you can survive these dark and difficult latter days as you wait for the day of His return. He has declared before the whole world the way of salvation. It's not a secret that needs to be decoded. He is the way. He is salvation. He is the true Moses who intercedes for us with His Blood, Blood that cleanses us from all sin so that instead of fearing the judgment we look forward to it. Those who are found in Him have already been judged on the cross through the font. Those who bear the mark of Holy Baptism on their foreheads have been made pure even as He is pure because they are marked with the atoning Blood of the true Passover Lamb. That is the good news that is for all people - God's righteous wrath against your sin has been completely poured out upon Jesus. Judgment left Him a lifeless corpse. But death couldn't hold Him because He was innocent. So are all who gather around this once lifeless corpse like vultures (or better translated, eagles), eager to feast on the Flesh which is true food and Blood that is true drink, given for the forgiveness of sins. Because that corpse is no longer a corpse. Jesus of Nazareth is fully alive, seated at the right hand of the Father, vindicated as the Son of God whose doctrine is the Word of the Father in all its saving truth and purity. And in the Holy Communion the saints feast on the resurrected Christ who is and who gives life to all who eat in true faith.

But woe to those who spurn this salvation. Woe to those who set up their own gods and offer their bodies in service to their idols. Woe to those whose hearts chase after worldly wealth and happiness and comfort and teach their neighbors and their little ones to do likewise. Woe to those who have been led out of Egypt but grow weary of the Lord's merciful patience, mistaking it for idleness and failure. Woe to those who pay only lip service to the things of God. Woe to those who withhold mercy and forgiveness. Woe to those who refuse to take up the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of God's Word. Woe to those who

neglect prayer and the fellowship of Christ's people. Such people make themselves easy targets for the devil and will be overwhelmed by the tribulation of these last days.

Do not be deceived. Christ has shown you the way and He has told you where you will find Him. He is not in the wilderness of asceticism or the inner rooms of your heart. He is and will always be found where two or three or seventy are gathered together in His Name around His things. There He will always be to save you and keep you. There He will always be to comfort you and forgive your sins so that instead of dreading the last day you may cry out with all the saints "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly and save us!"

In the Name of +Jesus.