

Populus Zion

10 December, Anno Domini 2023

St. Luke 21: 25-36

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

Daughter of Zion,

For many hope is truly the only thing they have, the chance that there is a future that is different and better than the here and now. The present is filled only with pain, frustration, uncertainty, fear, and sadness. The weight of unrelenting addictions; bodies consumed with the pain of diseases both known and unknown; the deep darkness of depression, anxiety, or loneliness; unshakeable grief; a marriage on the brink of divorce. Everywhere you look there is upheaval and unrest, families being violently ripped apart by the drones and bombs, by pornography, by selfishness, by heart attacks. Tyrants hold the consciences of their people hostage, looking on silently as the weakest and most vulnerable among us are cruelly destroyed. Our own bodies turn against us leading to deformities, internal confusion, childless marriages, and hallucinations. What hope could there be in the midst of all this? As we all know well, many of those whom we love and care about have opened their eyes on the vast wasteland of the present and simply given up, seen nothing to look forward to, no reason to hope, nothing to hang on to and found their answer in suicide. If you have or even are considering it, do not despair. There is hope. There is something far greater than this world to look forward to and it is drawing near. All that you despair of is passing away and for those who cling to Christ, what is will give way to eternal joy.

This world is a dark place filled with unimaginable and unspeakable evils and the unavoidable truth is that it isn't going to get any better. It would seem as though the tree of warning is far past budding and is into full bloom. The signs in the heavens and on the ground are mounting. Cemeteries are filling up. The wickedness, corruption, cruelty, deceit, and tyranny of the world are mounting by the day. God's embattled little flock is being kicked around and the wolves of hell are closing in. But the battle doesn't just rage on the outside. It is a war that is as near as your heart. As the world and our neighbors plunge headlong into to abject selfishness, indulging every sinful perverted fantasy imaginable, you feel the pull and are tempted to follow along for the sake of either ease or enjoyment. "Looking can't hurt." "How much damage could one time do?" "We don't want to offend." We look the other way while our daughters move in with their boyfriends or vice versa. We join the world as it treats children as commodities to be bought and sold, created and destroyed at will.

Our Old Adam is one of our very worst enemies. It betrays us, lies to us, strokes our egos, loathes our neighbors, and above all hates Jesus. Even though the Triune God has given us the promise of a clean conscience in the Baptismal bath, we are still acutely aware (Lord-willing) of the sin that sooo easily entangles. We feel the inner turmoil as the Holy Spirit goes to war against our flesh. We know how easy it is to lust after the girl in the commercial, to pretend we didn't see or can't help our neighbor in need, to stand in judgment over those whose sins and shortcomings are only more visible than our own. If we actually loved God and His mercy and believed His Word, we would be making excuses to come to church rather than skip it, asking why there aren't more opportunities to be in our Father's house calling upon Him in prayer, lifting up our voices together in song, receiving the

holy Body and precious Blood sacrificed for our eternal redemption. The Virgin's Son who rode into the Holy City on a beast of burden to humble Himself to the point of death on a cross, is coming again. The day of His return is coming, burning like an oven, consuming all the self-righteous and the arrogant, the unmerciful, the unrepentant, the wantonly treacherous. Heaven and earth will pass away but His Word will never pass away. What God has once declared sinful is always sinful. He doesn't change His mind. He isn't swayed by our foolishness that we love to claim is wisdom. He doesn't ignore sin.

Repent. But do not despair because there is hope...there is Jesus. Unto us a child has been born. Unto us a son has been given. And our sin and suffering have been laid upon His shoulders. He resisted every temptation that afflicts you – every fear, every doubt, every addictive desire, every grudge, every unkind word. And having resisted He was laid upon the altar of the cross and consumed by the fire of divine wrath. He alone was the object of God's judgment. Your sin no longer stands against you. Satan doesn't have a single charge left with which to accuse you. The world may spit and rage against you but it cannot harm you. Every cross, every rod of discipline that your loving heavenly Father lays upon you is sent only to strengthen you and prepare you so that you may endure to the end and be purified as He Himself is pure. We, like Christ, must learn obedience through what we suffer.

The Triune God is a God of hope and a God of mercy. He hears every cry for mercy before it is even lifted to heaven. He knows every affliction that that you have endured in soul, body, and mind. Dear child, your heavenly Father has heard your prayers even when you didn't know what to pray. He lifted up His countenance upon you and been stirred to compassion. He sent His only and

beloved Son to lift the terrible load of your sin and bear it all the way to Calvary where He poured His blood in payment. He has felt the burning arrows of temptation. He has endured not only the rejection but the hatred of the world. And in His death He has conquered it all. Death has lost its sting and the grave has lost its victory because Jesus lives and has walked out of the tomb. But He is only the first. He didn't just open His grave. He opened yours. He overcame your death, your sin, your temptation. You have hope. Jesus is your hope. He has promised salvation and deliverance to you and sealed that promise by Blood. The Shepherd of Israel, the Good Shepherd, who shepherded Israel through their wandering in wilderness and brought them to the Promised Land, is your shepherd and will just as surely lead you through this wilderness and bring you safely through. He knows the way. He has traveled the road from death to life and will lead you on safe paths. He daily lays before you the promise of your Baptism. He guides His precious flock to the table of the Holy Supper to feed you and nourish you for the long, difficult journey ahead. He offers to you the opportunity to hear the word of Absolution as often as you need it from the voice of His undershepherds. His Word teaches you truth and what is good. It unmask the evil that the world praises as good so that you may mark and avoid it. In all of these ways your Lord and Savior offers you hope in a world that offers none and works tirelessly to take away the hope that you have.

You do need to mark the signs and pay attention to them. Note the distress and perplexity of the nations, the terror they are enduring because they don't understand what is happening even though it is their own unbelief that is causing such upheaval and chaos. Notice that creation itself is groaning and being wrenched apart. See the tumult of the seas and the waves, the signs in the heavens, the wars, famines, and earthquakes - all just as your Lord told you. They are

happening but they are signs that Christ is near, that He is at the very gates and is about ready to return on the clouds. Indeed every cloud you see should beg the question “Will this be the one upon which my Lord comes?” He is coming to put an end to the mad raging of the devil and deliver us to the eternal joys and peace of paradise. Prepare yourself. Put away evil. Put down your idols. Repent of your sin. Bring your flesh and your mind into submission to the Word of God with fasting and prayer and daily study of God’s Word. You know the days. You know what the signs mean as surely as you know about budding trees in the Spring. Don’t ignore them or what they are proclaiming to you. Rather than be filled with despair, lift up your head with eager expectation, knowing that your Redemption is drawing near to deliver you, your Salvation comes.

Goods, fame, child, and wife – let these all be gone. They yet have nothing won. But God’s Word to you, attached to water, bread and wine, and spoken by His called undershepherds has won everything for you. The kingdom yours remaineth because Jesus yours remaineth. And He has promised to return for you, to take you out of this valley of sorrow, to put an end to your suffering and anguish, to wipe away every tear, to bind up every wound. Thanks be to God that all of this is only temporary. Our suffering will not endure forever. Even though you must struggle through the hardships of now, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. On that day you will leap and shout for joy, you will tread all your enemies under your feet, you will have eternal gladness of heart because when Jesus returns it will be the beginning of everlasting uninterrupted peace for you and for all of God’s beloved children. Behold, your salvation comes.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.