

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

17 November, Anno Domini 2024

St. Matthew 24:15-28

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

Beloved waiting children of God,

The day of all days, 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. 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. Every false teacher's wagging tongue will be shoved back in their lying mouths. 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. 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, nations consumed with unrest and war.

Those things are bad enough. But this election cycle has really pulled back the curtain on man's depravity and idolatry. We are told that all will be hopelessly lost unless the right president is in the White House and the right judges are on the bench. The devil has worked wonders deceiving humanity about what is important and getting us to chase after all kinds of false Christ's and false prophets. And God's children are as guilty as the rest. Have any of us spent anywhere near the time contemplating the return of Christ and preparing by being daily in the Scriptures and in prayer for ourselves, our family, and the world as we have watching pundits and election returns? How much time have you spent checking election results or your investment values? Countless conversations are being had in living rooms, cars, and around the dinner table about current events but are we talking about the promises of our Baptism or the imminent approach of our Lord? How much time have we devoted to devotions in our homes, to the preaching of God's Word, to receiving Holy Communion, to studying the Holy Scriptures in Bible Class each week? We're more than happy to open our mouths and speak the foulest things about those who disagree with us but will we go to our neighbor and share the good news of salvation and eternal life with him? False christ's don't just stand behind pulpits. They also wear suits and ties. They promise to save us from tyranny and death. But they are liars. They can't save you any more than they can save themselves. They are but men. They will wither and die and be forgotten. And woe to all who follow them. Repent.

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. Hopelessness and depression are befalling more and more people because the devil is growing more and more desperate as he sees the day of the Lord drawing ever closer. He is pouring every ounce of his energy into keeping people away from God's Word and drawing God's people away from their Father's house where the true medicine of immortality is freely given to those who believe.

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. You persevere by keeping your attention focused on the right things, by not placing your trust in those false christs and prophets who would lead you astray. The false christs and the false prophets are everywhere looking to take advantage of those who do not keep 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 preaching of the Word, without the Holy Supper, without the Absolution. 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. 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 end-time 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. My faith isn't strong enough to endure these days. I need the things of Christ. I need His Word. I need His Church. I need the Means of Grace." 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. Do not invite God to make you taste the bitterness of your false gods. Let us heed the warning and set aside our idols.

Men, you especially are called by the Lord to be on the front lines of this battle. You are to arm yourselves with truth and faith and bear the brunt of the war against Satan and his legions. You are called to your Lord's side to fight and bleed and die, not for yourself but for others. You are to know and speak the Word of God which casts down demons and silences their deadly lies. You are to fight the devil on behalf of your family - both the one under your roof and the one that gathers under this roof. You are to call sin sin and you are to comfort and console hurting consciences with the Gospel. The consequences of not are deadly for you and for them and God will require it of you. But what good is a soldier who either doesn't have the weapons or doesn't know how to use them? If we are too preoccupied

with our jobs, our success, our leisure, or our image we are worthless soldiers who will die on the battlefield and likely take others down with us and their blood will be required of us. We ought to be the first to confession. We ought to be the ones preparing our families to stand in the house of God and receive His precious gifts. We are to be the teachers of our wives and children. We ought to be the first in Bible Class where swords are sharpened and armor is repaired. Bible Class should be packed and nothing else should be going on anywhere in this building. Let us return daily in the strength of our Baptism to the things of God - forgiveness, salvation, His Word, and the Holy Sacraments. Let us fill our time, our eyes, our hearts, and our minds with the holy things that we may be spared eternal judgment. Let us hold one another to account that we may aid and strengthen one another and receive the commendation of our Lord and captain.

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. He is the way. He is salvation. His Word is life. Jesus clearly said "He who keeps my Word is truly my disciple." 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. His and His alone is the kingdom and the power and the glory. 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.

Turn off the TV, put down your phones, turn off the games. Open the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit of God may not only teach but comfort and strengthen you so that you may endure, so that even in the face of these dark times you may have peace and joy. Instead of binge watching something else, something that likely isn't edifying to you at all, sing hymns, pray the Psalms, fill your own and your family's ears and hearts with the joyous news of salvation and the promise that our Lord is returning to deliver His children from this life of misery and sorrow. The devil will not be able to stand it. He will be forced to flee. He has no answer to the Gospel. There is no longer any accusation that he can hold against you and without that, he has absolutely nothing.

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 who 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 the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the

prayers. Such people make themselves easy targets for the devil and will be overwhelmed by the tribulation of these last days.

The Lord is returning and none of us know the day or the hour. Temptations to sin surround us and the world is falling daily deeper into darkness and wickedness. But Christ has shown you the way and He has told you where you will find Him. He has preserved the truth in the Holy Scriptures so that you would not be overwhelmed or led astray. He has given you everything you need to meet Him with joy on the Last Day and He remains here with you to keep you and preserve you. He is and will always be found where His Word is purely proclaimed and the Holy Sacraments are faithfully administered according to His giving of them. There He will always be to save you and keep you. There He will always be to comfort you and forgive your sins. Close your ears to wild rantings of the mad world and its false christs and false prophets. They have nothing to offer you. Your citizenship is in heaven and your life is safely hidden in Christ. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly and save us!

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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