

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – November 10th, (11:11 am)

THE END TIMES ARE YET TO COME

Psalm 16

Daniel 12:1-3

Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-13

The Lord Freely Feeds and Provides for Us with Everything He Has

Those who contribute “large sums” from “out of their abundance” have done very little. They cannot purchase God’s favor with their money. But the “poor widow” with her two small coins, who “out of her poverty has put in everything she had,” entrusts herself and her life to the mercy of God (Mark 12:41-44). Such faith is not disappointed, for the Lord is faithful, and He provides for His people by His grace. Thus was the poor widow of Zarephath able to feed the prophet Elijah “for many days,” as well as herself and her household, “according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:15-16). He feeds us, too, by His Word, not only with daily bread for this body and life, but unto the life everlasting in Christ Jesus. “By the sacrifice of himself,” by the giving of His body and life and all that He had, He has entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb. 9:24-26). He is our great High Priest and the Temple of God, as well as the priestly food with which He feeds us.

One of my favorite parts of Handel's *Messiah* is "The Trumpet Shall Sound." The music, the bass solo, the orchestral arrangement, the trumpet, and the Bible text all together have become deeply meaningful to me. I like this part so much that, at times, I've even wished to be Christ's trumpeter at His Second Coming. I've prayed for it (believe me) ... I'm not a great trumpeter, but I do love this part.

In 1936, a film was made from the Broadway play *The Green Pastures*. The movie, with an all-Black cast, would likely be considered politically incorrect today. The film tells how God first sent Moses, then the prophets, to call His people back to Him. When all else fails, He sends His Son to share in their suffering. Mankind's rebellion exasperates all the angels. Over and over again in the play, Gabriel wants to blow his mighty trumpet to put an end to it all. Gabriel repeatedly pleads with God, "Now, Lord, may I blow the trumpet now?" But each time, God waits patiently. Finally, the angels, watching the chaos on Earth, exclaim, "Dear God, can Gabriel blow the trumpet now?" Even so, God doesn't allow it. "Only in my time," He says. (Imagine Gabriel with his lips on the trumpet, ready to blast, and... "no, not now.") **And so, the trumpet does not sound yet.**

Saint Mark's Gospel locates us in Jerusalem, near the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples were leaving one of the most magnificent structures of biblical times. The

disciples couldn't help but marvel at its majesty. The Temple in Jerusalem had been torn down twice by invading armies. King Herod undertook the rebuilding, expansion, and beautification of the temple around the time of Jesus' birth. It was acknowledged as one of the most beautiful building complexes in the entire world. The temple had gates and arches, tunnels and stairways, with stones gleaming white and overlaid extensively in gold. The exterior was decorated with marble walls and columns. The eastern side of the temple was plated with gold, and the ten gates into the temple were covered in gold or silver. For the people of Jerusalem, the temple was a symbol of glory to return to Israel.

The disciples were awed by the sight of this remarkable building. ***"Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"*** (v. 1). What Jesus said next almost amounted to sacrilege. ***"Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."*** (v. 2). What a thing to say! This magnificent house of God would be destroyed. This was completely unthinkable.

If that wasn't unsettling enough, Jesus goes on to speak about the end of all things. He warns the disciples, ***"And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."*** (Mark 13:7-8). The whole of Mark 13 contains signs that will indicate when the end is near. He warned about times when the followers of Jesus would be persecuted and brought before judges and kings. Family members would turn against each other (Mark 13:12). He also spoke of unnatural events in the heavens: ***"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken"*** (Mark 13:24-25).

Many of these predictions have already come true: wars, earthquakes, and natural disasters of all kinds—floods, famines, droughts, storms, tsunamis—you name it. And more is to come. Christians have faced persecution, and these hardships will continue. If we take all the Bible's predictions about the end of the world seriously, we are left with a powerful image of ***"the end times"*** or ***"the coming of the day of the Lord,"*** as the Apostle Peter describes it (2 Peter 3:12).

It seems that everything solid—even something as enduring as the temple, every human relationship, and everything we rely on in life—will all be suddenly wiped away when the end finally arrives. The disciples thought the temple would stand forever, but just a few

short years later, the Romans stripped it of all its precious metals and tore it down stone by stone, never to be rebuilt.

Scary, isn't it? The things we believe are so permanent are actually only temporary. It's hard to imagine what life would be like without the things and people that provide us with a sense of security and permanence. Our possessions, wealth, and achievements—all the things we think are important—are, in fact, VERY TEMPORARY. They can be taken away in a moment, and 'the rug is pulled out from under us,' as they say. We discover that the things we thought were so solid and vital are not things we can really rely on.

People facing serious illnesses have often shared that the things they once thought important no longer matter. None of those things can prevent their cancer or even delay death. All the things that were so important to them before their illness no longer have relevance. Even the doctors can't provide the permanence they need.

It is then that faith in Jesus, and the assurance, comfort, and hope He offers, becomes everything. The promises of Jesus we've heard a thousand times before suddenly take on new meaning and importance, while all the other things are pushed to the sidelines. In the end, our God and His promises of love, strength to endure, and the joy of eternal life are ALL WE NEED.

This is what Jesus is really getting at when He says, "There will not be left here one stone on another that will not be thrown down." As wonderful as the things of this life are, they are not permanent. We're easily led to believe that worldly things are essential. But, in reality, they're not. Just look at people in Third World countries, where widescreen TVs and other luxuries don't exist, or even electricity and clean water are hard to come by. Yet, they are still happy, despite the uncertainties in their lives. They don't need these things to be content. I'm not saying we shouldn't be grateful for the pleasures we enjoy, but we must be careful that our happiness and contentment aren't dependent on them. The Apostle Paul spoke about being content no matter his circumstances. His true contentment came from knowing Jesus and His love, which allowed him to face all situations.

He wrote, ***"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ"*** (Philippians 3:7-8).

When Jesus talks about the future, I don't believe He is telling horror stories to frighten us, like children huddled around a campfire listening to ghost stories. He's simply reminding

us of what we easily forget: our journey in this world is short. We're travelers passing through; our true home is in heaven, and our true wealth is in knowing Jesus' love and care.

The biblical writers recorded details about the end of the world to reassure us that, in the end, what matters is not *what* is coming but *who* is coming. Jesus says, **"And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven"** (Mark 13:27). This fulfils His promise: **"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also"** (John 14:3).

The approach of the end times might be intimidating in some ways, but Jesus will always be ready to help us. When the last day finally arrives, Jesus will return. (And the trumpet shall sound to Gabriel's joy!) He is our loving Savior. Those He loves and those who trust in Him have nothing to fear in these last days of chaos. Even the idea of the Last Judgement should not fill us with fear because we know that all the sins that could condemn us have been washed away by the blood of Jesus, as we read in Hebrews 10:11-25.

Jesus ends this "little revelation" in Mark 13 with good news. He says, **"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven"** (Mark 13:26-27). And the trumpet shall sound.

All of these dramatic messages end in HOPE. Hope is essential to see us through events that shake our lives and even the sea and earth. Once again, the most important thing is not *what* is coming but *who* is coming - JESUS CHRIST, our SAVIOUR. (And the trumpet shall sound.) Place your HOPE in Jesus! Amen.