

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The sermon last Sunday, I was told, was rather depressing. I suppose so; it certainly contained warnings to Jesus' twelve disciples, and therefore by extension to us who follow after them. The life of a disciple will get hard, if one remains faithful. It could even look hopeless: the temple, the symbol of God's presence, destroyed; "*wars and rumors of wars*"; "*nation [rising up] against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*"; "*earthquakes*" and "*famines.*" Being delivered "*over to councils,*" standing "*before governors and kings*" for following Jesus; being "*beaten in synagogues*"; "*brother [delivering] brother over to death, and the father his child, and children [rising up] against parents and [having] them put to death*"; being "*hated by all*" for being a Christian (Mark 13:1-13). And I gave you an example of one Lutheran Bishop in Finland along with a Lutheran lay woman who are courageously standing up for the truth against this hatred, against the power of the state arrayed against them.

So, yeah. I get it. That does sound a bit depressing. And as Jesus continues it's more of the same. It gets worse as the day of the Lord approaches ever nearer. Indeed, a bit later He says, "*in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be*" (Mark 13:19).

But I did try to offer encouragement — for courage in the face of growing opposition to Christians in this country, and confidence in the Lord who Himself endured the scorn of Jewish leaders, the scourging of the Roman soldiers, the shame of cross and death, but who also experienced the triumph of resurrection and His exaltation in ascension — so that by enduring in faith in Christ unto the end, we are saved.

We're in the same chapter in Mark today, but in our Gospel, Jesus has moved on to the actual day of His glorious return. In that day, for believers, all tribulation comes to an end. No more hunger; no more thirst; no more "*scorching heat*"; no more tears and weeping; just "*springs of living water*" (Rev. 7:16-17).

To be sure, on that day, Jesus says, awesome things will happen: "*the sun will be darkened, and [so] the moon will not give its light,*" either. "*The stars will [fall] from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*" This description is reminiscent of the events at Jesus' crucifixion: the "*darkness over the whole land*" (Mark 15:33); "*the curtain of the temple,*" "a tapestry of heavenly bodies" (Voelz, Mark 8:27-16:20, p. 985) "*torn in two from top to bottom*" (Mark 15:38). What happened at the cross was the redemption of the world! What will

happen at the coming again of Jesus is the consummation of our redemption, the resurrection of our bodies, our return to paradise in a new heaven and a new earth.

Jesus tells us that *“the Son of Man”* will come *“in clouds with great power and glory.”* This is exactly what the angels told the disciples as Jesus ascended from their sight: *“as they were looking on, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while [the disciples] were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’”* (Acts 1:9-11).

And even as angels were present as Jesus ascended into heaven, so angels will flank Jesus as He returns in glory, blaring their trumpets. They will cry out Jesus' command for the dead to rise up, and the dust will turn back into flesh, dry bones will rattle and come together, sinew will cover them and skin again, and breath will fill their lungs again. *“Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people”* (Ezek. 37:12).

Yes, in that day, Christ *“will put [His] Spirit within you, and you shall live,”* (Ezek. 37:14), so that we confess, *“On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ”* (Luther, Small Catechism, Third Article of the Creed). For these angels go forth *“from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven”* gathering the elect, living and dead. And the dead in Christ will be raised up and caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16). Then those still living at that time will join them as Jesus makes His way down to earth to sit on His glorious judgment seat. And, according to Matthew, here's where Jesus will say to the elect — *“You are blessed.” “Come, ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34).

Interestingly, Mark says nothing about the unbelievers, but they will be there too, Matthew says, separated from the elect. Unlike the elect, though, their tribulation does not come to an end but is intensified, for they are cursed, and their destination is the *“the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:41). For them, there shall be the deep wailing we just sang about and gnashing of teeth as they are cast into their punishment, an ominous combination of both fire and darkness (Matt. 13:50, 25:30). But for the righteous awaits the bliss of eternal life with the Lord. The choir will sing of it: *“How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth, yea, fainteth, for the courts of the Lord. My soul and body crieth out for the living God. O blest are they that dwell within Thy house; they praise Thy name forevermore”* (Brahms, “How Lovely” from Requiem based on Ps. 84).

Of course, everyone wants to know: “When will this all be?” Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus this very question. Ultimately, the answer is: “*no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” That means “*you do not know when the time will come,*” nor do the wolves in sheep’s clothing who seek to draw you away from the flock with their predictions. Even more, that means, we must wait “*for [this] mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*”

What are we to do in the meantime? Jesus said, “*Be on guard ... stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.*” And how are we to do that? Well, Jesus has given His servants work to do as we wait for His return. So keep doing that work according to “your place in life according to the Ten Commandments ... father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker” (Luther, Small Catechism, Confession). Act like a Christian, living in the forgiveness of your sins, “*building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit.*” Remember your baptism. Eat and drink Christ’s body and blood. Abide in Jesus’ word. Keep “*yourselves in the love of God.*” Show mercy to others. All this is to heed Jesus’ word: “*what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.*”

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.