

Advent 1-December 2nd, 2018 Gospel & Sermon
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Church

Luke 21:25-36

[Jesus said:] ²⁵“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

“The One Thing that Remains” - Sermon by

Vicar Randall J. Questad

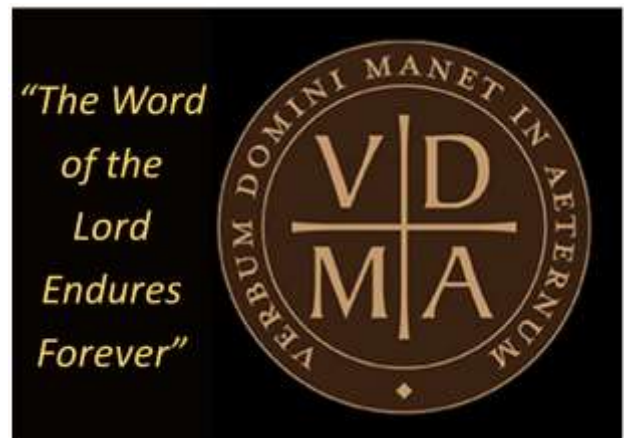
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The season of Advent is the beginning of the new church year. But on this first Sunday in this season of Advent, the gospel text for today begins with destruction. The new year begins by hearing about the end of times. However, we should not be surprised at this. The good news from Jesus Christ always emerges just when all hope seems to be lost. The gospel for today predicts what the end times and the last day will look like, but then we are reminded of the one thing that will remain or never destroyed--the word of the Lord.

You don't hear many sermons on the last day or the second coming of Christ and in some cases this is a good thing. Since, many times when you may hear a sermon about Christ's return its intention is to drive you to fear and make you wonder if you will be the one “taken” or the one “left behind”. This is usually the case when a member of the Jehovah witness church comes to your door and puts a doubt in your mind if you are ready for Christ's return and focuses on the signs that indicate that the time is near. These messages and sermons don't deliver words of faith and hope, but leave you in fear and uncertainty.

If you hear only sermons about when Christ will return, then you can be misled into thinking that Jesus Christ is somewhere else and is not truly present now. The Bible is divided into only two parts--the Old and the New Testaments. The Old says that Jesus is coming and the new New says that Jesus is here. The New Testament is not saying that he is still on his way or is not quite here yet. Jesus is here today because you are hearing him speak to you today in his preached word and in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. You know Jesus is here, because he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there **I am** in their midst.” So make no mistake, we are here today not wondering where Jesus is nor what he is doing. Jesus is here because his words assure us of it.

I just listened to a elderly pastor speak with such excitement of his twin grandsons. He further went on to say that his son and daughter-in-law the parents of these twins live in Germany. Then he said that these twins had not been born yet. This pastor spoke about his grandsons as if there were already here because of what he had heard from their parents. The only thing that could make them closer was to see them face to face.



This the confidence we too have about Jesus. Jesus is here today and it will only get better when we see him face to face.

Jesus tells us not to be surprised about the signs that we will see. These signs may seem scary. It was scary for many in Alaska on Friday when a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit parts of the state with over 200 tremors that followed. When you are driving on a road that had passed strict engineering standards and it just breaks into large pieces before you, it is fearful. When huge buildings topple down like pulling the last Jenga block out before the rest of the block fall down, it creates fear. Jesus told his disciples that the impressively large stones of the temple would fall in the same way and they did. But Jesus does not tell you these things to scare you into faith. Jesus says that when these things happen, you are not to run for cover and hide....you are to look up. You are to look up to Jesus who said these things will take place.

Then Jesus tells a parable. A parable of a fig tree. This is a good parable for us in the midwest to hear today. All week long, we were promised by weather meteorologists that a significant snow storm was on its way for the weekend. As I was writing this sermon this week, I wondered why I should even finish it since we would be all stranded in today. Before Saturday, the forecast had created enough fear that many of Saturday's activities were cancelled or postponed early on Friday. If Jesus wanted to use the parable of the fig tree to create fear, he would of instead told about how you know that winter was approaching and how as the weather gets colder and colder the fig tree keeps dropping its leaves one by one until there is no leaves left. There is only a cold frozen seemingly dead tree that remains.

But that is not the parable Jesus tells. Instead of adding fear to the signs of destruction, he says to look up. Jesus says to look at the fig tree and notice the tender new leaf that is starting to unfold. Then there is another and another until the only thing you can see is abundant life. At our house, we could use the tulips that are planted on the south side of our house as another parable. Often times, when there is still snow on the ground and it is usually around the time of Easter new green stems push up through the earth that once again comes to life. Hope of new life emerges again in this midst of death like the first candle of hope that was lit today in the Advent wreath.

Hope of new life is not something that you have to wait for. You and I have seen evidence of new life besides budding trees and tulips in the spring. This past Tuesday, once again I had the opportunity to have a worship service at the Dell Nursing Rehab Center. I have come to know many of these residents. One of them used to work for us for several summers. He told me how he remembered one summer he planted all of our soybeans. I also visited by godfather this week in a nursing home in Sioux Falls who is also nearing death. These residents however are not thinking about death, but the new life they will soon receive. These residents uplift me because they trust in the hope that has been given to them throughout their years by hearing the words of promise of Jesus. Words which are the only thing that remains, but words which are all they need.

These residents are parables like the fig tree. They don't fear the destruction of their bodies or even death itself. They are looking up. Looking up and seeing new life about to spring forth when Jesus comes again.

So what will be the difference between now when we know that Jesus is here because he has promised that through his word and his second coming? When Jesus returns, faith will be no more. You now need the words of Jesus because you live by faith alone. But when Jesus comes again, he will move from being "here" to being "near". Jesus will be even closer than he is today because you will not only hear Jesus, but you will see Jesus face to face.

Eleanor Farjeon whose name might not be familiar to you was an author born in England in 1881 and died in 1965. Her gravestone in England is not impressive, but the words that she gave us to sing in a couple hymns endure today because they speak of the new life that awaits us all. She wrote the words to "Morning has Broken" and our sending hymn for today "People Look East". The fourth verse to this Advent hymn describes the how the angels declare the birth of Jesus who is the word that will endure forever.

4 Angels announce with shouts of mirth
 him who brings new life to earth.
 Set ev'ry peak and valley humming
 with the word, the Lord is coming.
 People, look east, and sing today—
 Love, the Lord, is on the way.

Amen.