

He Controls the End Times!
Mark 13:1-13
Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 18, 2018

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

Our text, As he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If anyone wants to argue that doctrine and daily life are unrelated, he ought read our Gospel reading every morning. It’s easy to dismiss this Gospel as if it’s “only about the End Times”... but people forget we’ve been in the End Times ever since Christ’s death and resurrection! The End Times aren’t some well-demarcated number of years that is met with anxious anticipation (like when we all feared how our technology would respond to Y2K, the year 2000); the End Times are upon us every day, as long as ‘today’ is called ‘today’ it is an end times day because – the Scriptures say – Christ can return at any minute.

And, if every day is another day in the End Times, then we ought start reading these End Times readings of the Church Year to have a very present-tense character to them. Do we not hear of war and rumors of war; of nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, and the world’s governments plot in vain against each

other. We hear constantly of earthquakes – even along Midwest or East Coast fault lines we never knew existed. We know all too well of *hurricanes* and *forest fires* and (though not in ‘fat and happy’ America) *famines* in other lands. These beginning of birth pains are all around us, constant reminders that Christ’s doctrine matters because we live in the End Times.

New to *our* American reality, but known by Christians of many generations since the early Church, is the picture of being delivered over by the authorities for the sake of the Gospel. Delivered before governing bodies, beaten or persecuted or shot at in houses of worship, standing before governors and kings and supreme court justices and lawmakers on Capitol Hill and the Office of the Presidency. You don’t have to look hard to find examples of these in the news in our own society, just as Luther knew similar experiences of his own, just as Lutherans after him, and other Christians throughout the world before him... just as the apostles knew mere months after our Lord’s resurrection. And I haven’t even mentioned the division within families and the awkward tension certain family members’ false doctrine or even false practice of Christ’s true doctrine brings to families grounded in Christ. It all – from family to government to natural disaster – it all is commonplace as an influence upon the Church. And, because it’s so commonplace, we often overlook the signs. And, because we often overlook the signs, we don’t listen carefully to Christ’s warnings.

And what is Christ's warning: "Love everyone, tolerate everything"? No, actually. His very first warning is, "See that no one leads you astray." Jesus knows that life can affect doctrine. Doctrine is pure. Life is messy. Either doctrine carries life, or life carries doctrine, but they can't carry each other. Jesus' first concern is that no one leads you astray from right doctrine, because it is right doctrine that will help you navigate the messiness of life in these last days.

Now, what – in daily life – does that mean? Why is it dangerous that others will come saying, "I am he" (or really, in the Greek, the great $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ – "I AM.") Why, and *how*, does that affect us? As long as we know the catechism and say the Creed and recite the Lord's Prayer every now and then, won't we be safe?

It's dangerous because those who come saying "I AM" have a different way, a false way of salvation. Tie yourself to them and you can't be tied to Christ. And, it's *only* Christ's way that is true... that points you to justification through His death, the forgiveness of sins through the divine gifts that proclaim and pour out and distribute his life. You see, when Jesus says, "See that no one leads you astray," that doesn't happen by people saying, "Oh, there's another Jesus. Come follow him." We all *know* that's not the case. But, it does happen when people discourage us, "Oh, the forgiveness of sins? What does that have to do with daily life? Why do I or you need forgiveness of sins when we've got so many other problems?"

Hurricanes and forest fires, a government seeming to devour itself, nations rising against our nation. Family members threatening to never speak to us again unless we live daily life the way *they* want us to. Aren't all those things a bit more important right now than the forgiveness of sins?"

There's a lot of pressure in that moment, isn't there? A lot of pressure to say, "You're right. The forgiveness of sins is spiritual, but it doesn't have to do with daily life... and the daily life stuff is really ominous and worrisome and threatening right now."

But, friends, it's the forgiveness of sins that keeps you connected with, one with, God. (Wasn't our epistle reading all about that... Christ's sacrifice, forgiveness of sins, a clear conscience... and how did it end? – with reminder that the Last Day draws near!) Being connected with God means *everything* for daily life... and that means the forgiveness of sins means everything for daily life. Because everything else in daily life will be toppled over, but the one foundation that will be left standing and can never be thrown down is the foundation that is Christ Jesus... and our relationship with him is defined by his righteousness, his bloody sacrifice for sins, and his imputation of his righteousness (in other words) his declaration of the forgiveness of sins upon us.

So many may come saying, "I have a different Gospel that's more applicable to daily life." See that they do not lead you astray. And, when it seems like nations and kingdoms are falling around you,

do not be alarmed – for, one with God, who can judge or condemn us who belong to Christ – for we are “his own and live under him in *his kingdom*” – so, what threat is it to us if nations and kingdoms rise and fall around us?

But because Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, we ought not become complacent and think that the nation in which we live will always safeguard our earthly lives while we await the Last Day and the visible appearing of Christ’s kingdom. No, in the meantime, the world will let us know how much it belittles and denies Christ’s rule. So, “be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils and will beat you in [your houses of worship].” And under such pressure from society, isn’t it easier to change the look and sound of the church to fit the expectation of the culture? Isn’t it easier to change the confession of the Church, the doctrine of the Church, than to stand up to the culture? How many have already caved, wanting the church to be more ‘social,’ more ‘entertaining,’ more ‘accommodating’ to the priorities of life, simply more *worldly* – more accepting of the culture around us rather than seemingly tone-deaf in insisting that the Church, as a heavenly reality, must – by definition – have an other-worldly culture, with an otherworldly focus, taught and confessed through an other-worldly vocabulary. That doesn’t mean the Church isn’t in the world... by no means! The Church is Christ’s creation *for* the world... this is why he says in our text that Christians will endure being dragged before the governors

and kings and the court of worldly opinion – why? To bear witness before them. To tell them that the Church is for them, too. Christ's love and sacrifice is for them, too. The forgiveness of sins is for them, too. After all, Jesus continues in our text, "The gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations." Isn't that Jesus' saving purpose for us all – to bring the nations out of the nations (Gentiles out of the Gentiles) and into His Church, for it is His Church that is safely navigated through these end times; it's His Church that has every reason to eagerly anticipate the Final Day. So, "Do not be anxious," Jesus says, about your confession of the faith, for the same Holy Spirit given you in your baptism will safeguard you and confess Christ's name for and through you in that hour... not necessarily with glowing results *we'd* love to see – the text continues that brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents... and you'll be hated by all as they hear you confess Christ's name.

But, you have every reason to endure this in daily life – at school, at work, in society, even at home (because we sinners easily forget that doctrine is to govern home life!)... in all these arenas, you have reason to endure the great tribulation, these end times, and await the Final Day.

And you endure not just with hope and longing, but with comfort and consolation, and a shield and defense. Let's remember not only who knows all things of the end times, but the one who has

control over them... indeed, the one who *ushered them in!* As was said at the outset of this proclamation, The End Times begin with the death of Jesus! When Christ dies on the cross, God's plan of salvation is accomplished; it's brought to its fulfillment. The age of waiting and of preparation is over. The sacrificial Lamb is slaughtered; the heavenly sacrifice to end the age of sacrifice is offered; the Old Covenant of anticipation is closed and the New Covenant of completion is sealed with the blood of the testator. The death of Christ serves as the end of the beginning, and it ushers us into the beginning of the End. What matters now is the new creation, and the Church's (and Christ's) anticipation of bringing it from the realm of the invisible to be believed by faith into the realm of the visible to be beheld by sight. "Behold, I make all things new," Jesus says, and then shortly thereafter adds, "I am coming quickly."

Christ crucified, risen, and ascended is the *author* of the End Times. Christ glorified and coming again will also be the one who brings these End Times to completion.

The Church and her baptized children ought not be deceived into thinking the End Times will come crashing down on them, as if the world is spinning out of control. We might prove to ourselves the world is spinning out of *our* control, but not out of *Christ's* control.

Thus, the Church has no reason to fear, nor be deceived, but to simply remain with Christ, for with Christ you have nothing to fear about these End Times or about the Day of His Return. If you give up

Christ and idolize faithless secular merriment, then you *should* be very afraid (as our sermon hymn describes that Last Day, “then **fright** shall banish idle mirth”... idle *merriment*), and – if you live in such a way – there would be nothing in all the world you could pay me to trade places with you on the day of His return. But, as you hold fast to Christ and His Holy Word and His blessed Sacraments and to the forgiveness of sins by which He remains united with you and you with Him and you with one another, then you have all the riches of heaven... and one day – on that last day – the whole world – as every last one of its foundations is thrown down - will be envious of your solid foundation of Jesus Christ, and all the riches of the new creation He shares with you.

There’s one little word in this text that says it all: When the disciples are *admiring* the worldly foundations of the temple, they say, What *wonderful* stones and *wonderful* buildings.” Jesus says, “Such wonders will topple.” But, its that same word “wonderful” – ποταπος – that St. John employs when he encourages us with *these* words,

“What kind of – ποτοπαν – What kind of (wonderful, marvelous, other-worldly) love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so, we are. The reason why the world does not know us (and therefore, we bear its reproach in these End Times) is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now.”

That is ποτοπαν. That is worth admiring, worth cherishing. That is wonderful.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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