

The Twenty – third Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 21:5 – 36
Rev Joseph Highley
(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday, November 13th, 2022)

O Jesus Christ, do not delay, But hasten our salvation. Amen. Taken from last line, last verse of our song. At seminary, they recommend starting off with a quote, or a story or a poem, something to really make people ponder and think. Something nice and deep. So I'm going to give you an excerpt from a poem, a beautiful poem from the 20th century poet, R.E.M.

[Pastor singing] It's the end of the world as we know it. It's the end of the world as we know it. It's the end of the world as we know it. And, I...

[Congregation sings] ...feel fine.

Feel fine. Man, that was bad . It's like, you guys don't feel fine. It's the end and I feel fine. Really do. It's the end of the world as we know it. And I feel fine because I am ready.

I am a prepper. I am one of those prepper people. Totally prepared for the end, the apocalypse, the dystopian society that's coming. If you don't believe me, I have proof.

That's right. That's a box of food. I'm going to survive for a long time with 32 servings made with real beef and chicken, and this sucker doesn't expire until September of 2027, which when I bought this seemed like was a lot further away than it's looking like now. Box of food. You're like okay, you're not going to get very far with just a box of food. You're going to need some water. Shazaam! That's right. I haven't even opened this yet. I have had this for a while. Micro-filtration water system. It removes bacteria. What's Giardia and cryptosporidium? Those sound bad and it's going to remove those. So I can go to a pond, a scummy lake, and filter some water.

But life isn't just food and water, of course. I've got more. Rachell, I know that you're concerned, but don't worry. I got us covered. I have shelter, emergency shelter, a tent ideal for hikers or runners in remote areas and people staving off the end of the world. Emergency shelter.

This, this was a gift. This is so cool. This is like, well, we're going to need some light, you know, when the world ends. Oh, you have to blow it up, darn it. Okay, that's not going to work. I don't have the breath for that right now. Anyway, you can blow this whole thing up and it stands up like a lantern and then you can turn it on and it is solar powered led. This thing is going to last for like at least three more end of the worlds. Like the world could end three, four times. It's got different brightness settings. So we got light.

Of course, you need to make a fire, magnesium fire starter. Even if it's raining you can start some fire with that. The light was a gift from my parents two years ago. This was, I think,

last year. You got the nice little paracord bracelet with the, uh, compass on it, you know? Okay. So I don't know where I'm at. And this can apparently cut stuff. There's like a knife on that, but even better. Oh yeah, that's right. There's a saw in this thing and you can like saw down, like you just wrap yourself, give your tree a bear hug, and you just start doing like one of those jungle boot rub-a-dub-dub things and all of a sudden you've sawed off the tree. That might take you three more end of the worlds before you finally chop down one of the big trees but this is a legit saw that we're talking about there.

And then I think my favorite, Rachell just gave one of those looks that's like ugh... when I bought this. It's one of the best purchases I've ever made. This thing was like \$5 at Harbor Freight. This sucker is a knife. I mean, this would make Rambo jealous. It's got a saw on the back, if the one saw breaks. You could kill like a lion with this thing. Then the best part is that the bottom unscrews. You unscrew the bottom and there's another compass in case you get lost and you need to figure out where to find your other compass. And then you go in here and you've got a match, and you've got string with a sewing kit and love and hope and joy all packaged up in here like a little survival kit.

I'm ready. I am ready. I think we could make it at least a week, Rachell, when the world ends. Well, I don't know. I sometimes eat seconds, so maybe five days. I think we can make it five days and then I'll go hunting for all the squirrels with my knife. I mean, I'm ready. I'm ready. But all of that stuff, which is just stuff is going to do me diddly squat at the actual end of the world. It's going to be good for about this much. [Pastor indicates the number zero]

As Christians, we are actually ready for the end of the world. We're ready because it means our Lord is coming back. This is reading from our gospel, Luke Chapter 21. It is dramatic and it's heavy. It's very light on gospel, very large on law. So let's look at it. Jesus has these prophecies and they're kind of all over the place in terms of the thing he's referring to. At its core, there are three things Jesus is talking about here, the temple, Jerusalem, and the end of the world.

So let's look at this first little bit that starts it all off talking about the temple. So first question is, what is the temple? The temple is wherever God's presence on earth is promised to be. The temple is God with us. So the temple has actually a really long history. It starts out with the people in the Garden of Eden. God is templing with them. Then in Exodus, we have the people wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, and they build this tent called the tabernacle, which is just a fancy word for a tent. God tents with his people. He tabernacles with his people. To tabernacle means to tent, means to camp. God goes camping for 40 years with his people. 40 year long camping trip with Jesus, with God. Now, Jesus wasn't incarnate yet. Just be clear on that. From there, the tabernacle moves to Israel, and eventually they turn that tent, that flimsy tent into this majestic, huge, glorious building when Solomon builds it, but then it's destroyed. The Babylonians come in, they wipe it out, and the people go into exile, but then they come back, they build a second temple. That's the time of Ezra Nehemiah. Then God's word is silent

for 500 years. 500 years and then God decides he's going to tabernacle with his people again, to camp with them.

He decides to Emmanuel with us, God with us. That's when God himself comes to earth taking on human flesh and Mary becomes the temple. Mary becomes God's presence on earth as she bears that baby in her womb. Then Jesus is born and he is the temple of God on earth. That old temple, that building that's still standing, is passing away because the new temple, Jesus, is here, the presence of God on earth.

Then Jesus dies. He rises again, then he ascends into heaven. So now what about the temple? Well, Jesus pours out his spirit on the church, on the community of believers, on you. You are now the temple, because you bear the spirit of God. It's been poured out on you. The old temple is gone, and it's that old temple that Jesus is prophesying about.

Not one stone left on top of another. It's gone, destroyed, flattened, and it actually was destroyed. 70 AD, not one stone left on top of another. We have no remnant of that temple. There's a retaining wall for the hill that the temple sits on. The temple completely gone. Taken from the people of Israel.

Not only that, but second, Jerusalem, the whole nation, the whole kingdom will be destroyed, he says. That's the second thing Jesus is prophesying about. See, you can't kill your Savior who comes to you and have no consequences for it. These people are feeling the wrath of God.

This is the parable of the wicked tenants in action. The tenants are in this vineyard that's rented out to them by the king, and they abuse and kill all the servants of the king one after another until finally the king sends his very own son. And what do they do? They kill him too. So what does the king do? He goes and he destroys them.

That's what Jesus is saying is going to play out. The Father sends his son onto Earth to his people, and they abuse and they kill him. We must understand Jesus comes first to save the people of Israel, his chosen flock.

Now, this may surprise some of you, but Jesus was Jewish and Jewish people killed Jesus. But we also know Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, not just the Jews. The Gentiles, the non-Jewish people, they had a hand in killing Jesus too. It's all of our sin that put Jesus on the cross. We don't get off scott free here.

Repent. Destruction is coming. This warning, while it's meant for the Jewish people and would be fulfilled when Jerusalem itself was destroyed in 70 AD, the Kingdom of Israel was toppled, that warning is for you too.

These first two prophecies though, they've been fulfilled. The temple and Jerusalem, they have been destroyed. But the third, concerning the end of the world is being fulfilled right now.

Jesus' third prophecy here is that the world will end. This present creation Jesus will restore, renew, and redeem. You, when you die, your soul will go to be at rest with Jesus.

That's not the end goal. That's not the end of your story. When Jesus comes again in glory, he will raise you back to life. Your body and soul united together in life eternal. All because Jesus has restored and renewed and redeemed you.

I know it's easy to look around us and be scared. It's easy to be frustrated. It's easy to be mad. I mean, the whole world is just going down the drain. It's going down the pot. It's falling apart. It's breaking at the seams. It's a dumpster fire. It is hot, rotting garbage on a warm, humid Oklahoma day. It is going down the toilet. In a word, it stinks. Bad.

Just look around. This country's falling apart. The economy's falling apart. Things look like they're only going to get worse. Gas prices are high. Hurricanes are destroying Florida. Immorality is glorified and praised. Evil is called good. Good is called evil. Sexuality is exploited and abused. If you're someone who holds to the Biblical teaching, that marriage is designed for one man and one woman, and that sex is only designed to take place within that relationship, well, then the world thinks you're the worst of the worst. Suicide is at an all time high. Drugs are taking over our community. Our children are growing up outside the church.

Oh yeah, that church. That church sure seems emasculated. In the best case, it's shrinking and from the outside it seems completely unimportant. From the outside, even the inside, it sure seems like that church has lost its way. Where is the Lord of the church? Where is he looking after his church? Isn't Jesus still Lord of the church?

And the church at its worst? Well, we have entire denominations of Christian churches that are capitulating to the evils of this world. They're celebrating the evils of this world. It makes me just want to scream. In fact, I've screamed about it in this church before. It is exhausting. Just thinking about it, I honestly just want to sit down and just take a nap. I don't even want to think about it. It keeps me up at night if I think about it.

Deep breath Joseph, deep breath

Brothers and sisters, this is all going to take place. It has been taking place for 2000 years. And it will keep taking place until Jesus returns. There is nothing new under the sun. We are told that we will be persecuted and hated for Jesus' name. One can only imagine the society or culture that must exist to persecute someone for believing in Jesus, to persecute a follower of Jesus, to persecute truth.

Yet you don't really even have to imagine it. You can open your eyes and see exactly how a culture like ours could take that turn or already has taken that turn. You can look at our brothers and sisters around the world of which we get video, eyewitness reports giving up their lives, being killed daily for their faith.

Jesus says in verse 18, Not a hair of your head will perish. Well, how can that be, Jesus? And no, not just because I'm bald. I have hair follicles on the back. No, no, no, no, that's not what Jesus means at all. No, there are people out there in this world that are dying for their faith, not just their hair parishes, their whole body parishes.

What about that, Jesus? We as Christians know, however, that's not the end of their story. That's not the end of our story. When Jesus came the first time he came for the cross. He came in humility and service to take on the sins of the world, to take on your sins and die for them. And he rose again and he ascended in heaven.

But when Jesus comes a second time, he will come in glory to judge the living and the dead. Are you ready for it? Are you a prepper? It can happen any day. We need to get used to that idea and look forward to it. Our prayer should echo the closing words of the Bible. Revelation 22, Come Lord Jesus, not just come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, but come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

This should be our eager focus and our expectation. It's right there in the Nicene Creed that we say just about every other Sunday. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. And then we move forward... and I look for the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come.

That's what we eagerly anticipate. If we should die before that day, we still look forward to it. That glorious day when our bodies will be raised to life. It's interesting, we as Lutherans, we don't actually talk that much about the end times, about the end of the world. We reject along with the historic Christian Church throughout the ages, any notion of a rapture. Rapture theology has all these complicated things; like secret comings and secret followings and reigning for a temporary time by Jesus, and then not reigning and all sorts of complicated things like that. But within those theologies, they're very concerned about the end times even though most of them would say, Jesus can't come yet.

There's actually a restriction that says it's not possible for Jesus to come back because a certain set of circumstances still has to be filled a certain set of boxes have to be checked. We say nonsense. Nonsense. Since the day Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles and Christians throughout all the ages have been waiting and eagerly expecting the return of Jesus any day, like a thief in the night. Yet, we seem to be the ones who don't seem that all concerned about it that often. We are in the end times right now. This community, this Christian Church is waiting for it. That's what our hope is for. We're excited for it, we're longing for it. We're an end times community.

There's all these prepper end times groups. They band together out in the woods, off the grid and they get all sorts of food and solar panels and everything like that and they're waiting for the collapse of society. They're end times communities. Best of luck to them. This church is an end times community and we are preparing and ready for our Lord to return.

Are you ready for it? Our goal as a church is to be a prepper community. Our goal is to prepare you because as the last verse of our reading says, you will stand before the Son of Man, and we have the supplies. Our supplies are not boxes of food and water filters and fire starters or anything like that. Our supplies are the word of God. Our tools are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord Supper. Our tools are prayers and forgiveness and reconciliation. That's what we're all about. Preparing to stand before the Son of Man because it's going to happen. There's only one way to be ready for it and that is to have faith in your Lord, to have faith in Jesus.

Just in case little Mia tried to distract you from that, there's only one way to be prepared. Mia, there's only one way to be prepared to stand before the Lord, and that is faith in Jesus.

So throw yourself at the mercy of God, unworthy of his grace. Confess your sin that you are one who deserves to be swept away in all these disasters that Jesus talks about, the wrath that Jesus is talking about, the wrath that surrounds us each and every day, and trust in Jesus alone. Have faith in Jesus and receive the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the resurrection.

Unworthy as you are, God has poured out his grace upon you. In this world, it is passing away, but the word of the Lord never pass away. That word says the end is coming. When it comes, you will stand before the Son of Man, which is Jesus' favorite title for himself, the Son of Man, the God of all creation, you will stand before him and he will judge you. Are you ready to be judged by your creator? Those that rely on their own righteousness, their own works, will be condemned for all eternity. Why? Because Jesus says so. Jesus says, we're all sinful and unworthy, but those who have faith in Jesus and his works, what he has done for you, they will inherit eternal life. Why? Because the Son of Man, Jesus, has restored you. He has renewed you because he has redeemed you and forgiven you and loved you. You have eternal life right now. When Jesus raises the dead to life, you will live forever with him.

In closing, don't let yourself be afraid or distracted by the things that happen around us and the things that are to come. There will be evil and there will be sadness. This is true, but it cannot snatch you from the Father's hands. Not one hair on your head will perish. You are restored, renewed and redeemed, and you will rise again to the fullness of life and the age to come. Take heart. This is the word of the Lord, and while this earth passes away, that word remains true to you, forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds until the day Jesus comes again. Amen.