

Sermon on Luke 21.25-36 for the First Sunday in Advent  
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church - 12.2.18 – Pastor Nate Scharf

“Don't watch the game. Your heart can't take it.” Each year I've encouraged a member or two of ours who is undergoing heart issues that it wouldn't be wise to watch the game on TV. It's just a game –football or whatever, but it's amazing that even the nominal fan can get wrapped up in it and get fired up about a bad call or a great play. Can your heart take another holiday season? The gifts, the gatherings, the letters, the expectations seem to get bigger and bigger. The season has been extended as office Christmas parties are moving to after New Year's because you can't cram one more thing into this month. More importantly is your heart ready for Jesus' arrival? Our hearts need Advent preparation.

**Jesus takes us to The End to prepare us for the here and now and for what is to come.**

What is your end game with all the gifts and goodies? Is it to bring happiness to those you love? Keep things in perspective. How often haven't you seen the perfect gift cause a fight among siblings or be forgotten in a pile as they move onto the next and bigger gift? Keep perspective and think of the end game as you look at your life. Sit with Jesus' disciples on busy Tuesday of Holy Week. He shows them the Last Day to help keep perspective on life now. *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

Jesus had told his disciples the general signs of the end times which have been going on since Jesus spoke them. Here he speaks of what will happen at the Last Day. The sky which we've lived and moved under will change. The sea which can be calm and pleasant or fearsome and unforgiving will roar and toss like never before. And they won't know. They won't know. They – those people who had no time for Jesus or his Word, or with whom no one shared the good news about Jesus the Savior. They will be terrified – faint and even die for fear of what this means for them and for their eternity. In that moment there will be no mistake that there is more to life than what we see and experience here on earth. There is eternity, and they have the awful realization they are unprepared and doomed.

But not you. *“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* You, however, will see it differently. You know what this is about. It's the day – the day we look forward to and

pray for – the day Jesus returns in glory to deliver us once and for all. We don't have to fear. We know Jesus and we are his. We can stand up and lift up our heads with joy.

Have you ever been with some friends and all of the sudden from across a crowded room comes a loud and somewhat startling shout, "Hey!"? A large imposing figure approaches one of your friends. Your heart skips a beat because you might be witnessing a fight, but they both erupt in smiles and embrace in a hug. This is no threat or danger, but a friend. The Almighty Son of God is coming. Introduce your friends to Jesus now so that they know him as friend and Savior and not as judge and "too late." You want them standing with you on that glorious day lifting up their head and looking forward to his arrival.

"Trees." They look pretty dead right now don't they? But in just a few months, maybe 5, they'll shoot out their buds and their blossoms. And (after a couple more snowstorms) you'll know summer time with nice weather, grill outs, campfires, softball, fishing and fun will be right around the corner. Jesus says in the same way when we see the signs of the end we will know that Jesus' return is just around the corner.

These days are not easy though, the earth is filling up more and more each day with lovelessness, immorality and an out of control world. But this is what Jesus predicted. *"He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

Jesus predicted a lot of horrible things including the physical fall of Jerusalem as well as false christs and persecution for his followers. That all happened in that generation and all those signs of the times are still happening today (earthquakes, rumors of war). Jesus has not told us the day or the hour he will return, but these signs make us realize it is soon. He gives us two comforts couched in this prophecy. *"The kingdom of God is near."* Even in all this struggle God is still working in our hearts by his grace and the gospel of his grace continues to go out to others through us. He has not left us. And *"his Word will not pass away,"* ever. The promises he has made of forgiveness and life, the truth that he has given will never be empty, nor will they ever be snuffed out. Our flesh and hearts may fail but he is our portion forever. This is for eternity, even after the sky is rolled back like a scroll and this earth is destroyed. He is ours. We are his. His Word stands.

"Ok, that was good. Thanks Jesus, let's move on to more important things – getting ready for the holidays and for the big game, determining what to do with the diagnosis we got from the doctor, figuring out how I'm going to afford this or that or

pay off this debt, what I'm going to do now that I've lost my job, or got a different job." Sometimes our hearts mistakenly start to think that Jesus' death on the cross for our sins, his resurrection from the tomb and his ascension into heaven have no real specific bearing on today, my reality in the "here and now," even my future. *"Be careful,"* Jesus says, *"or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*

Jesus knew what it was like to be under pressure. He knew what it was to suffer loss, to have people hate him for no reason, to suffer abuse and unjustified taunts and attacks. He knew pain so vile and horrid so that we never would. He went to the cross for us, for our sin, and rose for our justification and forgiveness. Yet the temptation is there for us as we deal with life now to find comfort elsewhere. Searching for fun or maybe relief through alcohol or drugs and all the bad mistakes and neglect that come with it is a real danger, especially in our community and in many of our homes especially of German heritage. Think on that for yourself and for your loved ones. These things done legally and in moderation can be good, but you know and I know the dark side of these things and the trouble they bring. Where do you go for relief?

Jesus knew the trouble of this life, the anxieties, and the pain. Yet, He conquered it all. Where we struggle, have failed and fallen short, he fulfilled and went the distance in our place. Where we look in the mirror and see our sinfulness, regret and worry, he wipes the mirror clean so we see only his face, our heavenly Father's love and his mercy. All these temptations and sins the devil uses to drive us farther away from Christ, but Jesus says, *"Be always on the watch, and pray."* Look to him and give all this to him. And then *"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* He brings the key to unlock the door of this sinful body which is weak and struggles and he turns it into a glorious perfected body. He unties the bonds of sin and everything that has held you back throughout life so that you can serve him perfectly. He releases you once and for all from all the evil thoughts, the depression, the anxieties of this life and the trouble so that you can stand and breathe and truly live.

**Jesus takes you to the end to give you certainty, relief and hope for the here and now as we struggle.** Are you ready for another season, and for the last day? In Jesus Christ, our Savior, we are. And we can stand here and now as we wait for that shout at his return and he comes to embrace us his friends - forgiven, freed and thankful. Watch and Pray, dear Christians. Amen.