

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 24:15-28
November 12th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

For the Elect's Sake

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, ‘Lo, here is the Christ,’ or, ‘Here;’ believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, we most heartily thank Thee that by Thy Word Thou hast brought us out of the darkness of the Papacy into the light of Thy grace: We beseech Thee, mercifully help us to walk in that light, guard us from all error and false doctrine, and grant that we may not, as the Jews, become ungrateful and despise and persecute Thy Word, but receive it with all our heart, govern our lives according to it, and put all our trust in Thy grace; through the merit of Thy dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

My dear friends, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is allowed to wreak havoc upon mankind because of our rebellion against the Lord God, our clamoring after false gods, our inattention to His holy Word, and our unbelief. The Lord + Jesus promises in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew that in the Last Days there will be much tribulation. This is the result of the devil being given more leash to punish mankind, and especially the Christian Church for their obstinacy. Mankind will be punished for their unbelief either in this world or the next. Those in the Church who refuse to listen to the Word of God will be punished for their unfaithfulness either in this world or the next. The devil, who uses his agents of the world and our flesh, will bring this destruction upon us.

This is seen in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. The Lord God’s wrath was poured out upon the people whom He had chosen to be His special people, and whom He had chosen to live in the special land which He had picked out for them. But in their rebellion against the Lord God; in their rejection of the Christ, the Lord + Jesus, His wrath was poured out upon them when He destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The description of this historical event as recorded in the historian Josephus is horrific. As the Lord + Jesus says in this Gospel reading for today, it was a “great tribulation, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.” This history is read each year (or will be) on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday. In that Gospel from the Evangelist St. Luke, we see our Lord + Jesus weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem. So great was the horrors and atrocities that were meted out upon the city of Jerusalem, that the Lord + Jesus wept bitterly over

her.

But, my dear friends, the destruction of Jerusalem serves as an example to us in the Church. It shows us both the Lord God's wrath towards rejection and unbelief, and the fury of the devil which seeks mankind's destruction, especially of those who have called themselves Christians. The destruction of Jerusalem involved actual physical punishments. They were meted out against the whole people of Israel, who were in the city because of the Passover. They had rejected the Christ, and so were deserving of God's wrath and displeasure. And Satan was allowed full reign to wreak much havoc upon the former people of the Lord God. But for the elect's sake the destruction of Jerusalem was shortened. The whole event only lasted five months, from about April to September. Furthermore, the Christian Church in Jerusalem recognized the signs that the Lord had given them and left the city before the destruction began. Therefore, the Lord spared the elect and reduced the time of persecution to show His mercy to the elect.

The destruction of Jerusalem, however, is just a real event that serves as a microcosm of Satan's attacks on the Church until our Lord returns again on the Last Day. For having wiped out Jerusalem, the temple, and dispersing the survivors to the four winds of the world, we have a physical example of how the devil works in this world; what he wants to do to the Church—to us. The devil has become more crafty and subtle since then. For he sends his Antichrist into the world to punish Christians, lead astray the elect.

He did this in the early years of the Church through physical attacks, just like the final destruction of Jerusalem was real and physical. Many Christians were forced to remain faithful amid the threat and enactment of great persecutions. Fighting lions, being crucified, beheaded, run through with spears and swords, and all sorts of physical attacks meant to get Christians to deny the Christ, and give up their faith. Sadly, many did apostatize. We certainly have many examples of martyrs remaining faithful even unto the threat of death, because they did not fear a physical death, but feared the eternal death in Hell. They lived for the hope of an eternal life in Heaven with their Lord + Jesus Who they clung to diligently in faith. But we must also acknowledge that there were those who did not remain faithful, they gave up their faith for a few more years of life, and some even turned their former brothers and sisters in Christ into the authorities that they might face persecution, too.

The devil wreaked much havoc in this way, but he found an even better way to hurt the Church; to draw her children away from the Bridegroom, our Lord + Jesus, for Satan sent into the world the heretics. He sent those who would teach falsehoods, that deceived, if possible, even the elect. The heretics split the Church, for many people believed their lies, listened to their rationalizing of holy Scripture, so that many of the elect were drawn away. This is one of the marks of the Antichrist: he sits in the seat of the Church and destroys it from within. Many of those early heresies are still around just rebranded to fit the ears of modern listeners. Heresies—false teachings—had been around since the first century, but they were especially destructive upon the Church after the Christian Church had been freed from the physical persecutions of martyrdom. After the time of the martyrs came the time of the heretics.

Many false teachers still exist. The papacy sprung up teaching the Church falsely that one is saved by doing good works. They now teach both good works and faith merit salvation. The same is true of the Reformed churches, which teach a lot about faith, but also teach that one must prove their faith with their good works. They also teach that one must have faith and good works in order to be saved. We are saved by grace through faith. It is a free gift of the Lord God. Good works are result of faith living in us and are done because the Holy Ghost is living and working within us. But good works are never a requirement of salvation. They are proof that faith is indeed living and dwelling in us.

But because the Church is so fragmented and split into different sects and denominations one

has to wonder how one tells who is a false teacher, and who is not.

Our Lord + Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel reading. When we see the "abomination of desolation," that is, when we see falsehoods being taught in the Church by those who are in the Church, we must flee to the hills. What are the hills? The hills are the holy Scriptures. The Scriptures have been given for the sake of the elect. The Scriptures have been given to us so that we do not fall away into the various false doctrines of the world and other churches. For Satan uses the subtlest of means to draw people away from the Church in our day. He uses his false teachers to corrupt the Scriptures; to water down the Scriptures; to make them say something they do not actually say. Therefore, my dear friends, if we desire to remain faithful to our Lord and Savior, + Jesus, the Christ, we must ever flee to His holy Scriptures, for in them we find the truth of what He teaches.

This is also why the true Church maintains a strict adherence to the historic liturgy. For in the liturgy, we have a weekly reminder of what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. We are reminded weekly, or whenever we gather, that we have been baptized, that our sins have been forgiven by the Christ through His shed blood on the tree of the holy cross. We are given a meal celebrating this sacrifice; a meal of His Body and Blood given in bread and wine. We are reminded weekly, or whenever we gather, that our Lord God has forgiven us of all our sins, when the minister absolves us of our sins in the holy Absolution. We are also given the pure preaching of the Gospel from the pulpit which proclaims to us to remain faithful to the Word of God given to us even unto death.

For in the liturgy, we are given the pure Scriptures which teach us about what the Christ has done for us. Which is different from all of the false churches of the world, which places the focus on what they must do for the Christ. Such teaching is backwards. It makes us the focus and not the Christ. Therefore, my dear friends, let us flee to the holy Scriptures daily and often, for in them we are reminded of what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. In them we learn that we are poor, miserable sinners who deserve God's eternal wrath and displeasure. But we also learn that our Lord suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross to redeem us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

He allowed Himself to have the devil build bulwarks around Him and lay siege to His Body on the cross. The Jews and crowds of Jerusalem, beat Him, spit upon Him, mocked Him, ridiculed Him, and crucified Him. They surrounded Him and watched Him suffer and die in agony upon the tree of the cross. He endured the persecution of the Jews for the elect's sake. So that all of us who cling to Him in faith might also learn to endure the suffering and persecution of this life. Therefore, my dear friends, let us flee to the holy Scriptures, wherein we learn of our Lord's suffering and death, and wherein we learn that the time of our persecution in this life will be cut short so that we might endure it and reach our eternal heavenly home.

We have this promise of an eternal life with our Lord and Savior. And He is coming quickly to relieve us from the pain and woe of this life and take us to share with Him and all the saints the eternal joys of Heaven. May the Lord + Jesus come quickly and take away our pain and suffering and bring us to our eternal home. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!