

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

Daniel 12:1-3

Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-13

Imagine a month wherein all these things happened: The Cuban Missile Crisis, the assassination of both Kennedys and MLK, jihadists flying planes into the World Trade Center, Covid lockdowns, Hurricane Katrina, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Northridge earthquake, the fire that decimated Lahaina, and the Indian Ocean tsunami that decimated Asian coastal communities – calamity upon calamity – all happening in one month, one brief catastrophic month? Do you suppose people would be in a panic? Do you suppose that widespread alarm would lead folks to behave poorly? Law enforcement would be under duress. Militarism would be the order of day, martial law, rampant suicide, people hiding in their closets, fear and despair and apocalyptic visions would turn some folks to mush. Birth pangs; Jesus said that there will be birth pangs. Birth pains, for those of you who don't know, become more frequent and more intense as the time of delivery approaches. The Lord Christ gives you a word of encouragement: "Do not be alarmed" (Mark 13:7).

Some things we can't imagine. I have no idea what it will feel like when time stops. I have no idea what it will feel like when "the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken" (Mark 13:24-25). I have no idea what it will feel like when our Lord returns. Scripture says that every eye will see Him. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Revelation 1:7). Some things we can't imagine. Jesus said that He will ride the clouds and all His angels with Him (Matthew 24:30-31). What will we feel? The Lord of the cross tells you: "Do not be alarmed." I am eager for the day. It will be magnificent. It will no doubt be troubling as well. "Do not be alarmed."

After Jesus' resurrection, even after His ascension, Christians would look around every corner, half-expecting to see the Lord. How about you? Are you expecting His return? The church celebrates His return before it happens. The church is the bride who fills her lamp with oil in anticipation of Christ's return, joyful to receive Him at any moment. The Bible itself ends with these words: "'Behold, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Are you ready? In the old movies, when someone was about to die, the doctor would speak softly to the patient, saying: "You need to put your affairs in order." What does that even mean? I suspect it means creating a will, paying off your debts, naming your beneficiaries, naming an executor, organizing your papers, mending fences, saying goodbyes. Who do we do all of this for? We do it for our families. It's biblical, believe it or not. Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah, who was sick and spoke softly to him and said: "'Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover'" (Isaiah 38:1).

When God flooded the earth there were only eight people who were ready. Their house was in order. Their house was an ark. Destruction was outside and they were safe inside. Look at the inside of this church. Flip it upside-down in your mind. Imagine that this is an ark and we are sailing the oceans of time, headed toward the Last Day, and the Lord Christ is our captain. No

matter what is going on outside, His voice is steady: “Do not be alarmed.” In this ark there are events, past and future, that come to bear on us. The windows that bespeak Christ’s life surround you. His nativity, His baptism, His transfiguration, His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, His death on Good Friday, His resurrection, His ascension – His voice is beneath them all: “Do not be alarmed.”

The disciples look at the Temple and they are in awe. “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (Mark 13:1). No doubt it was impressive. But the Lord sees beyond this temporal sphere. The Lord sees what will come to that impressive-looking structure. “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Mark 13:2). And so it was. Jerusalem was sacked by Rome in the year 70AD. God had come to visit His people. God had come to bring salvation, redemption, forgiveness, grace and heaven. And Jerusalem rejected the Messianic King and crucified Him. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). Jesus wept over Jerusalem. As the Lord entered the city of His destiny, Jesus saw Jerusalem’s coming destruction and He wept. “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ...your enemies will... not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44). The time of your visitation – that is a beautiful statement. It’s not cryptic. It’s not complex. It is straightforward and powerful and pertinent for each of you.

The Lord visits us. He is present, in our ark, and His voice commands our trust: “Do not be alarmed.” Security; is there a people more secure on the planet than Christians? Calm, assured, confident in our future, confident in what our Lord has accomplished – security saturates this ark. God’s Word breathes into you the Holy Spirit. God’s Word clarifies a murky world. God’s Word set our house in order. Death and resurrection are the opposite of vague abstractions. Christ’s cross and His empty tomb are the most real things that you will ever know and He extends that reality to you as you travel through time in this ark, this church, this haven of security. People sometimes whisper to me: “Are we in the last times?” There is only one answer to that question. Yes; we are in the last times. There are no more boxes to check in order to pave the way for Christ’s return. Now is the time. And things may become more chaotic or they may become more calm but regardless, now is the time to look for Him, to prepare our house, to make ready for the King of kings.

How do you make ready? Repent; cast off the works of darkness; hone your mind to whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is commendable for the Lord is at hand (Philippians 4:8). Hezekiah recovered, by the way (Isaiah 38:4-6). Hezekiah prayed. God heard his prayer. You are a people of prayer. You are a sturdy people. You know the value of grace for you know how much you have been forgiven. You know the value of love because you know the value of Christ’s blood, the value of His suffering, the value of His love. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:8). Give knowing that as you give *you* are enriched and the world receives an epiphany of the Giver of givers.

I was in the Washington National Cathedral on Friday. What a marvelous structure; gloriously designed, massive and beautiful and architecturally transcendent. But it’s just a building. What makes a church glorious is the Word. Humble yet powerful, human yet fully divine, the Word of

God is what animates this holy house. The Word of God invigorates your heart and sets you on the course toward heaven. The Word of the Lord endures forever (1 Peter 1:25).

The Word of God is what makes this place holy. The Word never returns empty but accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11). That is God's design, not man's. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us, dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). God's design is an incarnate Savior, a grubby manger and a brutal cross. God's design is a washing of rebirth and regeneration. God's design is a Eucharistic feast, eaten in anticipation of our Lord's return. Jesus said: "The one who endures to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). He endured to the end. He is our security, our defense, and our hope. Our trust is entirely in Him. Come soon, Lord Jesus.