

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Malachi 4:1-6

2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Luke 21:5-36

Tom Izzo is the head basketball coach at Michigan State University. He's 70 years old. He's what we call a "hard-nosed" coach, and some don't like his style. A reporter pushed Izzo a bit and asked why a player had been benched. The coach replied directly. "If starters don't play well, they get benched. That's where they stay until they can earn back my trust." The coach told the reporter that he pushes his players, not because he's got nothing better to do, but because the players themselves have goals that they want to achieve. The coach further explained that wanting it and doing it are two different things. Players earn their time on the court. That when Tom Izzo said this: "That's the American way. Except America is getting soft."

See if you can track this sequence of statements, this circular series of statements: Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. Weak men create hard times (and now we're back where we started). Where are we in that sequence? Christ's church, I mean, where are we in that sequence? Are we getting soft? It's not to our advantage to be soft, spiritually entitled, preoccupied with superficial trash. This world will end. As it does there will be upset, tumult, calamity. A soft Christian is an "at risk" Christian. By soft I mean distracted, enamored with the world and its drivel. Jesus paints a picture that is hard for some to look at. The Lord Christ warns of political upheaval, unchecked warfare, and that the earth itself will revert to chaos, that God will withdraw His benevolence and this orderly creation will become unstable. Do any of us have a strong enough faith to remain balanced in the face of such chaos? How does one *prepare* for such a thing?

We start preparing by knowing the story. The Lord and His disciples are in the vicinity of the temple. It was visually beautiful, visually impressive. Someone says as much. But Jesus sees more than just a beautiful structure. What does *He* see? He sees the *destruction* of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem – that's what He sees... and He sees this world's end. God's judgment came crashing down on Jerusalem. In the year 70AD, about 40 years after the Lord's death and resurrection, Rome sacked Jerusalem. A historian by the name of Flavius Josephus describes the carnage, the extent of the suffering, the behavior that the Israelites resorted to in order to sustain life. The description is raw, stomach-turning. Why? Why would God turn His wrath on Jerusalem? Why would God bring such destruction on His chosen people? Because they had rejected His Son. "He came to his own and his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). Reject the Messiah and there is no place to hide when God comes to judge the living and the dead (John 3:19).

As the Lord pronounced the coming judgment He wasn't vindictive. He wasn't "hopped up" on revenge. The Lord Christ wept over Jerusalem shortly after He rode into the city triumphantly on Palm Sunday. He wept because He saw the coming ruination of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). Rome would encircle the city, set up a barricade, and eventually break down its walls, plunging the citizens into chaos and turmoil. Not one stone was left upon another. Jesus foresaw it. Jesus told His own what was coming and it happened, it came to pass, just as He said. Why? God anchored an event in history as a foreshadowing of the end of the world. It's a warning, an

ongoing spiritual test of the emergency broadcast system. There is such a thing as spiritual peril. We have a soul. This soul will live, even though we die. Life after death has a binary conclusion – heaven or hell. Reject the Christ, abide in unbelief, and hell will consume you – no escape, no reprieve, no negotiation. On the Last Day, when Jesus comes again in glory, He will raise all the dead, and all humanity will be gathered before His throne. Faith: one has it or one doesn't. Christ's righteousness: it's either credited to your account or it is not. Do we claim the crucified King as our Savior or do we not? What are you allowing in your life to crowd out Christ's Word, Christ's voice, crowd out attending this Divine Service?

Mick Jagger tells a story about working with Keith Richards. They're not exactly Sunday school types – Mick and Keith, but the story is apt. Keith was a notorious drug addict. Mick wasn't a "goody-two-shoes" by any means, but he wasn't at the mercy of substance abuse the way that Keith was. Here's how Mick describes working with Keith: "If you're on some heavily addicting drug, you think about the drug and everything else is secondary. You try to make everything work, but the drug comes first." What is every human's drug? Self. Self-righteousness, self-pity, personal pleasure, imbibing the drink of pride, consuming whatever floats our sensual boat and the result is that we become heavy with self, numb with self, prisoner to self. Satan loves self. The demonic tempts you with it, the world promotes it, and your own sinful flesh craves it. Here's Jesus straightforward warning: "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34).

Do you think Christ's church is vigorous, full of life? How did we come to be that way? Is there something grand in Christ's Word, something graceful, something majestic and wondrous and mystical and good? God's Word brings life. God's Word is living and active. Death and resurrection have been bonded to this Word. Christ's Spirit attends this Word, and the Holy Spirit brings wisdom where there was only foolishness, brings light to dark places, brings hope where there was only despair. Vigor! The vigor of a triumphant Savior is what God has implanted in us. When our Lord told His disciples about their impending trials, He wasn't teaching them how to predict the future. He was preparing them spiritually for what lies ahead. Your car needs gasoline. Your lungs need air. Your soul needs God's Word. Start preparing for what lies ahead there. Here's what the Son of God said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Luke 21:33). This eternal word brings vigor to your soul that will serve you as this fallen world becomes even more troublesome.

God's kingdom comes by way of this word. No power on this planet can impede Christ's power as it is manifest in believers. He *saves* us. The temple in Jerusalem was just a shadow that was cast by the body of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:1). In the OT, the temple was where God's presence resided. Jesus *IS* God's presence among us. In the OT, the temple was where the sacrifices were offered. Jesus *IS* the sacrifice to end sacrifices, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the OT, God's holiness resided at the temple. Jesus *is* God incarnate. Jesus *is* God's holiness. Jesus is greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6). He is the stone that the builders rejected which, by virtue of that very rejection, has become the chief cornerstone – the stone that cannot be moved, can't be supplanted. The omnipotent Son of God willingly spilled His blood to make Rylee Blake holy, and so she is. The Kingdom of God came upon Rylee as she was baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11). Rylee herself is a temple

of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19; Acts 2:38-39). She is prepared for the Last Day. Christ's holiness defines her. No one can snatch her out of the Master's hand (John 10:28). Spiritual vigor is in her soul. It is to be nurtured, just as the vigor in your soul is to be nurtured. Christ's Word makes strong men, strong women, strong boys and strong girls. In every age, in this age, we are called to be strong, prepared for whatever God has in store. Heaven is our goal. Are you committed?