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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 13, 2022
23rd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 33/Year C

First Reading: Malachi 4:1-2a

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:5-19

Sermon Title: “*The Difference Between the Temporary and the Eternal*”

Theme

The end is near. There is no doubt about it. The warnings are dire. The tone of today’s texts is ominous. But the baptized know how to live in the meantime. The baptized are strengthened for the living of these days in word and sacrament. The baptized rally around the invitation of the apostle: “Do not be weary in doing what is right.”

Texts:

First Reading: Malachi 4:1-2a

¹See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ^{2a}But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

⁶Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. ¹¹For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work.

¹²Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Gospel: Luke 21:5-19

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, [Jesus] said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

⁷They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” ⁸And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.

⁹“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” ¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹²“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Sermon

For those of you liturgical calendar watchers, we are in an active time. Specifically,

- October 23rd ~ 20th Sunday after Pentecost (green)
- October 30th ~ Reformation Sunday (red)
- November 6th ~ All Saints Sunday (white)
- November 13th ~ 23rd Sunday after Pentecost (green)
- November 20th ~ Christ the King Sunday (white)
- November 27th ~ First Sunday of Advent (blue)

Appropriately in the liturgical church, the paraments, the colored fabric adornments on the altar and pulpit, are changed to their corresponding colors every week, thanks to Pam Cronenwett.

If you were not aware of it, Christ the King Sunday, next Sunday, is the last weekend on the liturgical calendar, so that makes next Sunday the church's New Year's Eve Sunday, so to speak, and the following Sunday, the First Sunday of Advent begins the next liturgical year, so that makes it the church's New Year's Sunday. I know you don't really care. No one is planning any parties to celebrate it. But the church does, even if you are not aware of it.

As we approach next weekend, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday on the liturgical calendar, this weekend, the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, we have readings that present warnings that I will agree, sound frightening and threatening. Together these warnings tell us that a day is surely coming when the current age is complete, and the new age will begin. Let's look at the readings.

I am a fan of the Book of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, from which our First Reading comes. On behalf of the LORD, the prophet wrote of a day when the faithful will be rewarded for their lives of faith. This is good news, even for those of us who have it pretty good in this life. To you, myself included, I remind us, though we have it pretty good now, and if the truth were known, we don't really look forward to the end of this life, what God has in store for us is so far greater than our good lives now, that it is beyond our imagination. We should look forward to it.

In this passage from the end of Malachi's brief prophecy, he wrote metaphorically on behalf of the LORD, that on that day there will be unbearable heat that will purge the earth of ¹the arrogant and all evildoers. The punishment will be so great that even the earth will be purged of root and branch – the arrogant and evildoers will not survive.

My Grandma Jesse loved to burn things. Living on a farm, she would burn the ditches to keep the weeds and grass down. On one occasion, she burned a farm building down, and on more than one occasion, while burning the ditches, the volunteer fire department had to be called to put out a ditch fire that got out of control. Here is the point, though she burned the grass in those ditches, it always came back. Malachi intentionally wrote that the LORD said that this coming heat will be so intense that even the root and branch will be destroyed – it will never come back.

And while this might sound frightening and threatening, it shouldn't to us. For us, ^{2a}who revere [the LORD's] name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. Though we may suffer in this life, we will survive. You see, there is a difference between the temporary and the eternal. Though this age we live in, and our mortal bodies are temporary, we who are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, are made for eternity.

In the Gospel Reading, we find Jesus in the great Jerusalem Temple, without a doubt, the biggest most beautiful building he or his fellow countrymen had ever seen. He had been teaching, but his opponents challenged his authority and tried to entrap him by asking him to respond to their questioning when the Gospel Reading took place.

Jesus prophesied that even that beautiful building that was the focus of their worship and that they all loved, would come down; be destroyed. This was not received well, and I dare say, was received as frightening and threatening. They asked him when this would happen. And in his typical mystical way, he told them. You heard it. It sounds similar to the passage from Malachi.

- Wars and insurrections
- Nations will rise against nations
- Earthquakes, famines, plagues

- Dreadful portents and signs from heaven
- Persecutions, imprisonments, betrayals
- Some will even be put to death

To some degree, it sounds like any day right now, but I think Jesus was speaking of far greater degrees. And yet ... just like the LORD said in the prophecy of Malachi, while this might sound frightening and threatening, it shouldn't to us. Though we may suffer in this life, we will survive. You see, there is a difference between the temporary and the eternal. Though this age we live in, and our mortal bodies are temporary, we who are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, are made for eternity.

So what should we do in this in-between time? I am so glad you asked because the apostle Paul provided us with an answer from his second letter to the Thessalonians.

Never lacking in humility, Paul wrote that we should imitate him and the other apostles in godly living. More specifically, he admonished idleness - not having anything meaningful to do, taking advantage of the generosity of others, and being busybodies.

He exhorted everyone to toil and labor doing their work quietly to earn their own living. He wrote, ¹³Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

I have been leading a Bible study on Revelation on Wednesday evenings, and ironically enough, this last Wednesday the readings were also downright frightening and threatening, and that is where that session ended. But I was quick to remind those in attendance, that though the events John saw in his revelation and wrote down are indeed frightening and threatening, they shouldn't be to us. Though we may suffer in this life, we will survive. You see, there is a difference between the temporary and the eternal. Though this age we live in, and our mortal bodies are temporary, we who are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, are made for eternity.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So, as we approach next weekend, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday on the liturgical calendar, the larger church has taken this time to present warnings that I

agree, sound frightening and threatening, but they shouldn't be to us. Though we may suffer in this life, we will survive. You see, there is a difference between the temporary and the eternal. Though this age we live in, and our mortal bodies are temporary, we who are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, are made for eternity.

These warnings tell us that a day is surely coming when the current age is complete, and the new age will begin. In this in-between time, the faithful Christian toils and labors not just for the *physical* well-being of ourselves and our families, but also for the *spiritual* well-being of ourselves and our families, and for his church, the bride of Christ, and for the world he created out of love.

Prayer

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without you nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Embrace us with your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide, we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen