

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 25B (Proper 28B)
November 14, 2021
Mark 13:1-13

Enduring to the End

Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. . . But be on your guard. . . . [T]he one who endures to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:5, 9a, 13b ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When you look at the world, you see it's a mess. More and more, with each passing day, each passing moment, it seems things are going from bad to worse. Our bodies and minds suffer the effects of aging or disease. Morality is disintegrating as the self, one's emotions, is the ruler of all things, including one's identity, sexual or otherwise. To contradict such claims is considered hateful assault on a person's very being. Reason, logic, and authority have no standing, as facts don't matter. It really does seem that the end is at hand, or at least it is near, as what Jesus describes appears to be happening in the here and now. So, as always, we do well to listen to our Lord Jesus so that we will endure to the end and be saved.

"See that no one leads you astray [or deceives you]," Jesus warns His disciples. He's preparing them for the difficulty of remaining faithful to Him in the midst of a world set against Him and His Word. He's also warning them about the temporariness of this world as would be evidenced by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple - which would also point to the end of the world and the final judgment.

The conversation that prompted His words began with the disciples marveling at the magnificence of the Temple. It was made of huge blocks of white marble. It glistened as the sun set behind it. And the grandeur of the surrounding buildings in the complex only added to the awe-inspiring scene. To most people, this was a building that would last forever. And it should considering what it cost and that it had taken 46 years to build. Besides, it was the house of God.

So when the disciples made a comment to Jesus about the "magnificent buildings," Jesus used the occasion to teach them about building for eternity. He directed them away from temporal, man-made buildings to those made by God and eternal. Indeed, as magnificent as the Temple was, it was going to be destroyed as an act of judgement. Just 40 years later, in the year 70 AD, it happened just as Jesus had said it would. The Romans entered Jerusalem and totally destroyed the Temple so that not one stone did remain on another. So it is that earthly buildings don't last. No matter how well they are built they will eventually be destroyed. Nothing we make lasts forever.

Now, as Jesus told the disciples about the coming destruction of the Temple, He warned them about the last times. Indeed, they would be terrible times in which to live. "[W]ars and rumors of wars . . . [N]ation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines." The same problems which had plagued mankind would continue as they had in the past. And things haven't changed. We too are living in the last days. The end of the world is coming.

So, we take heed to the same warnings that Jesus gave to His disciples. "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." As we are being built into a spiritual house, we do see many who would deceive us. Many teach false doctrine as though it were true. Some claim to know when the end of the world will come or when Christ will return. Some even claim to be the messiah or savior. Some deny the signs of judgment all around us. Others try to scare us into following them by pointing out the wars and rumors of wars and the natural disasters that have occurred. And yet, Jesus tells us that these things are merely the "beginning of birth pains." That is, things will get worse before the end comes.

That's why we need to listen to His warning. As God's children living in these troubling times, we want to endure to the end. Our spiritual lives are much more important than our physical lives, though they can't be separated. Unless the Lord Jesus returns beforehand, our physical body will die and decay no matter how much we try to keep that from happening. That's why it's so important to attend to the building of our spiritual houses. That's why we live in repentance. That's why we regularly read and study God's Word. That's why we commune at His altar. That's why we confess our sins and receive holy absolution. For whenever our sins are forgiven, our faith is strengthened and our house becomes stronger and stronger. As we depend on Jesus Christ and all that He has done "for us and for our salvation," we build on solid rock and our spiritual building becomes more sure.

After all, Jesus is our great high priest who has "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins." By the shedding of His holy, precious blood on Calvary's cross, He has atoned for all your sins and says of you, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Therefore "there is no longer any offering for sin." Jesus has done it all. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, the curtain has been pulled back and we can enter the presence of God Himself with hearts "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. 10:11-25).

That enables us to endure and withstand the trials and tribulations that come our way. The disciples really did face arrest and persecution for their faith. Many believers in the first few centuries of the church suffered martyrdom. Many were betrayed by family members because they believed in Jesus or because they refused to give up the Bible to be destroyed. There are even many today who suffer for the sake of Christ as Christians in other parts of the world suffer atrocious acts of violence against them. And while we may not suffer such severe persecutions yet, it is becoming more difficult to witness to the hope that is in us. It is becoming more difficult to stand up for Jesus as people work to eliminate Christianity from the schools, the

workplace, and, it seems, the world. It is becoming more difficult to be a Christian because we live in a time when so many people don't believe that there is any absolute truth, except what they feel is true. Still, eternal salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone is the only foundation on which to build our eternal house. God's forgiveness of our sins for the sake of Jesus' bitter suffering and death alone is the only material that will build our house so that it will not be shaken. His death and resurrection is the only basis for our faith and life. Only as we abide in Jesus will we endure to the end.

That's why we need the encouragement to band together in this building of spiritual houses. We need each other to "stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25). Yes, we are in this together. And the day is surely drawing near.

By God's grace, we will remain faithful and true to Him, and will receive that which cannot be shaken. "He who endures [or stands firm] to the end will be saved." What a glorious promise! Not that we can do it alone, of course. We face many trials and dangers. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we will heed Jesus' warnings. We will "[s]ee that no one leads [us] astray. . . [We] will be on [our] guard." We won't allow ourselves to be deceived by the ways and thoughts of this world, though we so often are. We won't be frightened when the world starts to fall apart. Rather we will trust only in "Jesus' Blood and Righteousness." And as we thus endure, our lives will stand forever. Our spiritual building, our salvation, is all God's work in Christ. So, we live in Jesus and for Jesus in everything we do – in faith receiving the salvation He earned for us and following His will as outlined in His Word, even against the world around us. He is building us into a spiritual house that will last forever. God grant each of us to endure to the end and be saved. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener