

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 26B - Proper 28B
November 17, 2024
Mark 13:1-13

Building for Eternity

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,

There's something about humanity that looks ever forward. With the election now past, some look forward with hope and eager anticipation. Some, however, look forward with wringing hands and dread at what they're certain lies ahead. For some, you'd think the end of the world, or, at least, the end of our country, or way of life, was at hand. I've seen clips of people in tears, distraught and terrified at what the future will hold. That's why looking back to the days of endless political ads, it would have been good to hear our Lord's words, "See that no one leads you astray [or deceives you]." Of course, Jesus wasn't referring to election ads, or any other kind. Rather, He was warning His disciples about 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.

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's the House of God.

So when the disciples commented about the "magnificent buildings," Jesus used the occasion to teach them about building for eternity. He directed them away from temporal buildings to those eternal. Indeed, as magnificent as the Temple was, it was going to be utterly destroyed. 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 remained on another. So it is that earthly buildings don't last. No matter how well they are built they will eventually be destroyed. Nothing made by human hands lasts forever.

Now as Jesus told the disciples about the coming destruction of the Temple, He warned them about the last times as well. 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 have plagued mankind would continue as they had in the past. And things haven't changed at all. We too are living in the last days. The end of the world is coming.

So, listen to Jesus. "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 the date of Christ's return. Some even claim to be the messiah or savior. 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, there will be more before the end comes. So don't listen to false teachers. Listen only to Jesus. For He alone is the Messiah, the only Savior of the world.

That's why we need to listen to His warning. As God's children living in these troubling times, we want to build that which lasts forever. Our spiritual lives are much more important than our physical lives. 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 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 wherever the Means of Grace are used, 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 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 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. But in truth, 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.

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." Yes, we are in this together. And the day is surely drawing near.

By God's grace alone, 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. 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 do 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. He is building us into a spiritual house that will last forever. That's building for eternity! God grant it to each of us. Amen.

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

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