

22 November 2009
Last Sunday of the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Not Yet - Stay Awake”

Text: Mark 13:24-37; Isaiah 51:4-6; Jude 20-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When you think of Jesus returning at the end of time and this world coming to an end, what do you think of? What images come to mind? For me, this week, I thought of the old TV show M*A*S*H. (Some of you will remember that show.) It was a sitcom about a bunch of army doctors and nurses in the Korean War, and the trials and troubles they went through taking care of the wounded soldiers brought to them. Sometimes they would get wounded too. But despite all the different situations that came up, through all the joy and sorrows, there was one overriding theme across all the years, from the first episode to the last: *they wanted to go home*. And when the show ended and they all finally did get to go home, that is still to this day (I believe) the most watched TV show of all time. People understood, and so they **stayed awake** to watch it.

Well that is what Jesus' return will mean for you and me: *that we finally get to go home*. Not to our earthly homes, our childhood homes, or anything like them. For some folks, that would not be good news at all. Some homes in this world and life are not good places. No, when Jesus returns, He will gather us to our *real* home, our *true* home, *His* home, where, we heard a few weeks ago, there is no hunger, no thirst, no hurt, and no tears. (Rev 7:15-17) It is the home of righteousness, where there is no sin. (Rev 22:3) A place of rest after the battle of this world and life. So, Jesus tells us today, **stay awake** for this show! **Stay awake**, because you're not going to want to miss it.

But it's hard sometimes to stay awake. For we get tired of the fight against satan, tired of the battle against our sin, tired of taking care of the wounded, tired of hoping for that which seems like it will never come. And so perhaps you inebriate yourself with pleasure for a while. Or go with the flow for a time. Or distract yourself with work. And you get spiritually sleepy. Perhaps you even begin to think of this world as your home, that it's not so bad after all. That happened to many of the people of Israel in exile in Babylon, at times to the doctors and nurses on M*A*S*H, and to many in the Church Militant today.

When that happens, that's when the bombs in life become good things! When they

wake us up from our spiritual stupor, make us see again the battle that we're in, and turn us back to our hope, our Saviour, in repentance and faith. And to remember what Jesus said: **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."** That's an amazing statement, isn't it? For we usually think the opposite: that nothing is more sure and durable than the heavens and the earth. Good ol' *terra firma*! And that words . . . words don't last; words are forgotten; words are said but not meant; words go in one ear and out the other. But no, we've got it exactly wrong. What we think will last will not last. Isaiah told us today that **"the heavens [will] vanish like smoke, [and] the earth will wear out like a garment."** But Jesus' words will not pass away. The Word of the Lord remains forever. (1 Peter 1:25)

And that is true because Jesus, the Word made flesh, cannot not be silenced. Satan *tried* to silence Him through the death of the cross - to silence the Word that once sounded forth at creation. The Word that had cursed satan for his violence in the beginning. The Word that had promised a Saviour. The Word that had spoke through patriarchs and prophets. The Word that spoke a wisdom not of this world. The Word that resisted and rebuked him in the wilderness. The Word that spoke with authority. The Word that cleansed lepers, forgave sins, gave hope to the outcast, and life to the dead. Satan *tried* to silence that Word - that horrible, life-giving, life-changing Word! *But he could not.*

For in truth, *the cross did not change God - God changed the cross.* He changed it from an instrument of death to an instrument of life. He changed it from a silencing tool to a megaphone that would now proclaim His love and mercy to all people.

For on the cross, we see what Isaiah spoke of: that there, God set His **justice as a light to the peoples.** For there, the payment of your sin has been rendered by the only one who could render it: *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* And so the cross has been changed from a threat to a promise, for what is demanded **of you** Jesus has given **for you.** In Him, the darkness of sin has been changed to the light of life. And so it is as He says: *I am the Light of the world.* (John 8:12) The Light for us who dwell in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death. The Light of hope for us who are wearied by the battle strain. The cross shines **as a light to the peoples.**

But not only that - Isaiah then also says we see there **the arms of God [that] will judge the peoples.** For there, on the cross, the arms of God are stretched out not in wrath, but in love. That the sinless one be judged guilty, and we who are guilty be judged sinless. And so the cross has been changed, from a horrible word of condemnation to a wonderful word of forgiveness. Changed from a gurney of death to a throne of life. The throne, from which the Son of God said: *Father, forgive them.* (Luke 23:34) And the voice that spoke at creation and it was so, and who spoke life to the dead and it was so, spoke too this word, *and it is so.* For you.

And so the cross did not silence God - no, actually just the opposite: the cross has silenced satan and his accusations. And so on the third day, *and ever since*, the voice of God Your Saviour sounds forth. To speak to you words of forgiveness, words of blessing, words of life. Words that you need to hear as the battles rage on - the battle against the sin in you, the battle against the sin inflicted upon you, the battle against the sin you inflict on others. And those are mighty battles indeed. But in the midst of them, wounded and tired though you be, to you Jesus says: *Peace be with you* (John 20:21), I forgive you. *Peace be with you*, satan did not win! *Peace be with you*, satan cannot win.

And though heaven and earth will pass away, these words will *never* pass away.

For through His death and resurrection, Jesus is *making all things new*. (Rev 21:5) A new heavens, a new earth, a new you. Through His powerful Word Jesus is giving you the fruits of His death and resurrection to bless you and keep you and "new" you. Giving you not always what you want, but always what you need. That you die with Him, that you rise with Him, and that you live with Him, forever. Forever, for He has abolished death. Forever, for He has beat down satan under His feet. Forever, for His Word of forgiveness and life will never pass away. For these words are no mere earthly words, but heavenly words, eternal words.

And you need not ascend to heaven to hear these heavenly, eternal words - they are spoken here, to you, for you. Here, in the midst of the battle, Jesus is making all things new. For as Jesus said: ***This generation will not pass away without seeing these things take place.*** And you see them. Though they are hidden, you see them with the eyes of faith. Jesus coming to us, even now, each Sunday, each day in His Word, raising us from our sin and giving us life; raising us from our fear and giving us hope. Forgiving us, feeding us, washing us, strengthening us, promising us.

But also telling us: *not yet*. It is not yet time to go home. ***Stay awake!*** The signs are ripe, the time is short . . . but *not yet*. You must go back out, into this world of sin and death. Into the battle. There are many casualties; many who need snatching from the fire; many who need mercy; many who are dying; many who need your prayers. The time to go home is coming, yes, dear children, it's coming. But it is *not yet*. Go back, though it is hard. Go back, though the foe seems strong and keeps dropping his bombs! Go back, to love and serve. And when it is time, and not too late, I will take you home, to my home, to be with me. Fear not.

And so until that day, we gather here, together, one in Christ Jesus, one in His body and blood. And we go. Not alone. Never alone. For He is with you, in you, to sustain you and shield you. And when the last day comes, that great and awesome Day of the Lord, you *will be* ready and awake - not because you have done it, but

because He has.

Dear children, the fruits of His cross are ready and ripe. Come. Your Lord is calling. Come, until *He* comes, and takes you home.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.