

Jesu Juva

“A Day of Fear or a Day of Joy?”

Text: Luke 21:5-36 (Malachi 4:1-6; 2 Thess 3:1-13)

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

I cleaned up the leaves that had fallen in my yard this past week. A yearly ritual. The trees are almost all bare now. The reds and yellows that just a few weeks ago were so brilliant and made the trees bursting in color and so beautiful, are now curled up and dead on the ground . . . and *now* in bags, waiting for the trashman to pick them up. The wind is going to start to howl now, without the leaves to break its path, the temperatures are dropping, and maybe even soon some snow is going to cover the ground in a blanket of white, burying nature.

We know its only temporary though. Even beneath its white blanket of cold and death, signs of life appear. And springtime will come.

But it will not always be so. There's going to be an end. There's going to be a time when the heavens and the earth will die and not awaken. The heavens and the earth that God created in the beginning, so perfect and good and filled to the brim with life, and never meant to die, will die. Just like men and women, specially created by God in the beginning, unlike anything else in all creation and never meant to die, *will* die.

Because this good and perfect creation of God was hacked by satan. A virus of sin and death implanted in us just like so often happens in computers today. When that happens your computer doesn't think like it should, and neither do we. When that happens your computer acts in unpredictable ways, as do we. When that happens, your computer sometimes dies, as will we. Though for us, no sometimes or maybe about it.

This is all what Jesus is talking about today, His words to us today. Look at the trees, He says, and take a lesson. Look at the upheavals in creation, like in the Philippines, and think about it. Look at the havoc men heap upon each other in wars and tumults . . . this should tell you something. And it does, if we will listen. It does, unless we choose to ignore it because, well, it's just not very nice to think about.

But Jesus will not let us forget. And so the Church which proclaims the Word of God will not let us forget. The Church Year - not the calendar year but kind of it's fiscal year, if you will - comes to an end next week. And in the last few weeks of this year every year, we hear these words again. To remind us of this truth.

And Jesus, in fact, from the words we heard from St. Luke today, goes on and on about

this. This is one of the longest Gospel readings we ever hear. So much so that by the time we get to the end, you probably want to say: *Alright Jesus! We got it! Can we talk about something else now? Something a bit more cheery? A bit more upbeat?*

But here's the thing you need to realize: for Jesus, this is cheery! This is upbeat! Not because Jesus delights in our misery, but because ***when you see these things taking place***, Jesus says, ***you know that the kingdom of God is near***. And the day of the kingdom of God is the day Jesus is waiting for. It is the day Jesus is working for. It is the day Jesus cannot wait for. It is the day when all His own, all His children, will finally be all gathered into His house, one family, together, for all time. It's like the holidays that will soon be with us when many families get together and houses are full and filled with joy and laughter. That's what's going to happen on that day, and Jesus is excited for it.

Or maybe another way to think of it is as a student in high school or college (or since George is here today, seminary!). Before you get to the end of the semester, you have to go through finals and projects and finish everything up. And that's a hard time. But when it's over, there's joy! You get to go home and relax and be with family and friends. So for us, before the end, there's going to be a tough time - all those things Jesus talked about. And it's not going to be easy. But it all just means that the joy is coming, and almost here. The joy that the prophet Malachi spoke of, when he said that when that day comes, ***you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall***. Now, I'm no farmer, so I don't really know what that looks like. But I can imagine it. The calves running out into the meadow on the first warm spring day, filled with joy, exploring everything, happy to be alive. So will that day be for you - happy to be alive in the kingdom of God.

And that it may be so for you, that's why Jesus came. That's why the kingdom of God drew near to us *first* in the flesh and blood of Jesus. And why Jesus said ***truly this generation will not pass away until all has taken place***. Until all that is necessary for our eternal life has taken place. Until the cross has taken place.

Until Jesus passes through death to life again, so that death and the death of this world be not the end for you, but that you too pass through these times and that day to life with Him. To the life promised you in your baptism, begun in your baptism, and brought to its completion on that day.

And though everything else pass away, ***though the heavens and the earth pass away***, Jesus says, ***my words will not pass away***. For Jesus, the Word made flesh, having already died and already risen from death, cannot pass away again. And so His words are as eternal as He is. His Word will not pass away. His baptismal word-promises will not pass away. His promise that He is your anti-virus, your anti-death, that your sins are forgiven. His promise that you are His child. His promise that He has gone to prepare a place *for you*. And His promise that He will be with you through these dark and difficult days. You will not be alone.

And so yes, heaven and earth are going to pass away, as we see with our eyes. But when they do, this will still be left - your Saviour, His Words and promises, His kingdom, and your life with Him.

Yet though the signs are all around us, still we do not know when that day will come. And don't believe those who think they know, Jesus says. So far, all who thought they knew have a perfect record: *they've all been wrong*. So instead of worrying about it or trying to predict that day, Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians: ***the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ***. Which, I would say, is another way of saying *the cross*. That as we wait for that last day, while all these things that Jesus talked about are coming and happening, direct your eyes and your hearts to the cross. For *there you see the love of God for you*, that so important are you, so valuable, so precious, that God would send His Son to die for you so you could live with Him.

Now the world, in these gray and latter days, measures your worth quite differently than that. The world measures you by your job, by your wealth, by your weight and looks, by your achievements and accomplishments. The world sets its own standards - which, by the way, are constantly changing. Athletes so overpaid and revered now were not always so. Teachers which used to be valued highly are now in many places overworked and underpaid. And how often do standards of beauty change? And so measured by the world, you may be worth something today and nothing tomorrow. You may be in today and out tomorrow. And if their judgment is how you judge and measure and value yourself . . . well, no wonder there are so many in our world today who are confused, depressed, worn out, and who don't know what to think.

But the cross . . . the cross says something much different. Your value, your worth? The Son of God. Who traded His life for yours.

And there you see not only the love of God for you, but *the steadfastness of Christ for you*. The steadfastness of Christ who would not be deterred, who would not come down from the cross, who would suffer all that for you. Because you're worth it. And if He did that for you, fulfilling all the promises of God and all the prophecies of God and all the plan of God, you can count on Him. He will come back for you and keep you until He does. And so He comes for you now in His Word, in His forgiveness, in His Supper, to feed you and keep you. Or as Paul put it, ***to establish and guard you against the evil one***. The evil one who hacked us in the first place. The evil one who wants you to think that God is not for you but against you, that you are not in His favor, that you need to worry. *But the cross teaches us otherwise*. Keep your eyes on that, and these places where Christ and His cross and His promises and His forgiveness are for you today, and you'll know the truth - the truth that sets you free.

And so until that day, Paul says, as you keep your eyes and hearts focused on the cross,

repent and believe; but do this too: *pray*, and *do not grow weary in doing good*. Don't be idle, thinking that there's nothing you have to do and so there's nothing you're going to do! No, your neighbor needs you. He needs your prayers. She needs your love and mercy. And do all this all the more as these things happen, as the last day grows ever closer, as the kingdom of God draws closer. You see the signs, don't ignore them. Rather, let the death that you see be the rising of your life. Let the evil that you see be the rising of your good. Let the sin that you see be the rising of your forgiveness. That the death and rising of Jesus be lived and be a reality in your life.

Until that day does comes when there is no more death, only life. No more evil, only joy. And no more sin, only love. As it was in the beginning and will be again, forever.

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