

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 18, 2018
26th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 33/Proper 28/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 13:1-8
Sermon Title: “A Quiet and Confident Faith”

Theme

In the last week of his life, Jesus warned his disciples concerning trials that were to come upon them and upon the world. He exhorts the listener: Do not be alarmed.

Text

¹As [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Sermon

Do you realize that this is the first time in ten weeks that I have preached a sermon based solely on the lectionary and without another agenda? Seven weeks on the Seven Faith Practices and three weeks on the annual stewardship campaign, "Reflecting God's Goodness" and I am ready! How about you? Let's get started.

^{1b}There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.

The Book of Daniel from which the First Reading comes is known as Apocalyptic Literature and as such, along with Revelation, is full of bizarre prophetic visions of the End Times. The setting for this passage is The Great Tribulation, what Jesus himself said would indicate the end of the age. We are led to believe that that time will be a terrible time – "a time of anguish" wrote Daniel.

But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.

There are three important points in this brief passage that I would like to note. Though the Great Tribulation will be a terrible time the likes of which the world has never known, those who stay faithful will be rewarded. The first point is that Daniel wrote that deliverance will come to those who are found written in the book. That book is called the Book of Life in Revelation. You want to have your name in that book, metaphorical or not.

²Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The second point is that that day will be a day of judgement. Daniel wrote that on that day there will be a resurrection of all those who have died prior to that day and then, along with all those who are alive at the time, there will be judgement.

As an aside, there are many well-reputed theologians who follow a line of thinking called "universal salvation" that espouses that ultimately all will be saved. There is more to their argument than I am stating simply, but as I look at several passages like this one, I don't know how that line of thinking holds up. Very clearly,

scripture says about all of us, that some will go onto experience everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

So what to do? Sit by and wring your hands wondering if your name is written in the Book of Life or not? Calm down, God revealed in Jesus Christ has a simple solution to this situation.

Ready for another of my axioms? Here it comes, about that concept of universal salvation, "I hope they're right but I don't think so." So for me, and as your pastor, my hope for you is that we simply say, "I'll take my chances with Jesus." That is all that is required for you to get your name in the Book of Life.

³Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

And a third point is, those whose names are written in the Book of Life and who receive everlasting life "are wise" and "shall shine like the brightness of the sky, like the stars forever and ever."

I have to admit, I have had some accolades thrown my way in my life. None of them come close to this.

But we are human and the fire and brimstone days of the past in American Christendom have led us to doubt. Now I am not going to do this, keep your hands in your laps, but I wonder if I took a show of hands right now of who among us is confident in our salvation, how many hands I would see.

The right answer is – all of them.

"But pastor, you don't know the trouble I've seen! Oh the sins I have committed!" some will say wringing their hands.

Let's move on to the Second Reading for an appropriate response. In that reading the Apostle Paul quoted the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah when he wrote,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

And then Paul went on, writing,

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have *confidence* to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in *full assurance of faith*, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our *hope without wavering*, for he who has promised is faithful.

Now I have bolded and italicized several words in that passage to emphasize my point. Beloved of God, saved by the Blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, I exhort you to have "A Quiet and Confident Faith."

Moving on quickly to the Gospel Reading, Jesus and his disciples were admiring the beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem, and it was truly beautiful; one of the most beautiful buildings in the land, when he said those disturbing words about it all coming down.

Imagine, Jesus, who by this time had established himself as a noteworthy prophet of Judaism, saying that its primary feature, the Temple, where all Jews came to offer sacrifice for the redemption of their sins, would cease to exist. That meant that the very system the Jews used to acquire the forgiveness of sins would stop! Unthinkable!

When the alarmed disciples asked about this Jesus responded by saying,

⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

In other words, Jesus says to his faithful ones including you and me, "You have nothing to worry about. Things are happening just as they are supposed to. You, with a quiet and confident faith, stay strong and all will go well for you.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin' the Bar Challenge for all of us including me this week is to grow in our faith. I believe that it is God's desire for each of us to have what I have entitled, "A Quiet and Confident Faith."

It is contrary to scripture, especially the scripture we have for our readings today, that we doubt the love, grace, and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ. God never promised that life in this life would be easy, without drama, and hardship. But I do think that all these natural life events provide us with an opportunity to take comfort and refuge in the LORD and have the potential to help us build character and faith.

Provided that your life is relatively stable and peaceful at the moment, it is easy for us to say, "Yes, my faith is strong," but what do you have when life goes wonky?

Let's work on this now, and then, if and when life does get wonky, we will be solid in our quiet and confident faith.

Prayer

Loving God, how blessed we are to have been exposed to the Gospel of your Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. Forgive us when we listen to the world tell us that that the story is just too good to be true. Instead, continue to send us your Spirit to embolden our hope and trust in your promises that we might have a quiet and confident faith until the end of this age and we are joined with you in eternal life. We pray this in the name of our great high priest, Jesus Christ. Amen