

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Memorial Lutheran Church, Toledo
November 18, 2018

Text: Mark 13:1-8
Theme: When Will This Be?

In the Apostles' Creed, we confess, our Lord Jesus "...will come again to judge the living and the dead." Similarly in the Nicene Creed that we will use during Advent, we say, our Lord Jesus Christ "...will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." At the conclusion we add, "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Who of us has not asked the question, When will that coming again be for this world, this universe or, more immediately, for me? And, will our Lord's coming again be good news or bad news? At the time of that coming, using language from the First Lesson will I be received "... with shame and everlasting contempt" or be numbered among "the wise" who "...shall shine like the brightness of the sky." (see Daniel 12:3)

Behind that question lies a deeper question, who or what is finally our God? And, is that God trustworthy? In his explanation to the First Commandment in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes, "A "god" is the term for that to which we look to for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart." He adds, "Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God." When that "end" comes, and come it will, who or what will be our God? And will that God prove worthy of our trust?

When will this be? Our text comes after the lesson in which Jesus criticizes the temple leadership while admiring the poor widow who put in her two coins, everything she had. As Jesus and his followers walk out of the temple recently re-built by King Herod, one cannot help but cry out, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings." When one today visits the Temple Mount in Jerusalem upon which now sits the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic shrine, one can still see some of the massive stones that provided the foundation. Yet, though he spent much time in the temple, going back to when he was twelve years old, Jesus does not seem so impressed. "If your trust is in this temple, you are going to be disappointed. 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'" Probably by the time the Gospel of Mark is written down, the Roman army will have come into Jerusalem and utterly destroyed this temple.

As they move to the Mount of Olives, overlooking the temple, Peter, James and John, Jesus' inner circle, accompanied by Andrew, pursue the conversation a bit more, "Tell us when this will be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished." Jesus offers a sobering response that provides no timetable, "Beware of the false messiahs who make claims on people. Wars and rumors of wars do not yet signal the end, nor will natural disasters like earthquakes and famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." He will continue with a description of the suffering his disciples will experience. In the midst of the painful stuff of life, to what or to whom, will we trust ourselves even to the end?

For years many within this country operated with the idea of our own invincibility. That trust was shattered September 11, 2001, when the massive Twin Towers came tumbling down. One could argue that we have been trying ever since to restore the god of invincibility. It cannot in the end be our god. We arm ourselves with more and more weapons as if that can protect us. What it gives us is more violent deaths than any nation in the free world. We marvel at our mastery of nature only to be devastated by hurricanes and fires, even in a place called Paradise. We comfort ourselves with our storehouses of wealth only to discover their vulnerability in a depression in the 30's, a downturn in 2008 or the uncertainty of the present

time. Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, shocked many when he declared that the time will come when Amazon goes bankrupt. We pride ourselves on our individual accomplishments or successes only to be humbled by the onset of a sudden illness or accident that creates a different future. Even and particularly those who confess their faith in this Messiah will not be immune from suffering, sometimes particularly because of their confession of faith.

The psalmist will recognize the truth. "But those who run after other gods shall have their troubles multiplied." Those other gods too will die-our military might, our wealth, our buildings, our health, our accomplishments-all those things we are tempted to look to for our good. This Jesus himself will die and with his death will be declared to be a false messiah. His disciples will flee and those who watch his crucifixion will mock him, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." He does not come down from the cross. As Mark tells the story, Joseph of Arimathea will take down his limp body, wrap it in a linen cloth, put it in a tomb and rolled a stone against its opening. Several beloved women look upon the grievous scene.

But don't mistake this end for **the** end. Unlike the others gods that will fail us, this one has defeated death. From the open mouth of a tomb, the words will echo, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. Look there is the place they laid him." (Mark 15:6) This is the one to whom you and I can look for the source of all good. This is the one who proves trustworthy. This is the one who grants us the Holy Spirit so that we can say with the Psalmist, "For you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your holy one see the pit. You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy." (Psalm 16:10-11)

About those endings-that of this world, this universe or our own-when will this be? Jesus will point out, "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." But we know what we need to know for faithful living in this moment. That makes all the difference in the world. Last Sunday, Bill and Carol Ballert were with us in worship with typical grace and humor. With us they received the gift of our Lord's eternal presence in the Lord's Supper. Later in the week, Carol, would experience illness that leads to the decision to move towards hospice care. In the midst of their sadness, Carol and her family, know God's promises in Christ. They know the gift of Christ's peace. They don't know what all the future holds. But even in the face of death, they know the one who holds Carol's and their future. So do we. "We look for the resurrection of the death, and the life of the world to come." That's very good news for both our living and our dying.