

Sermon Proper 28 2019  
November 17, 2019  
Luke 21:5-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

My wife and I used to commonly have hanging in our kitchen a calendar from the graphic artist Mary Engelbreit. One year, we remember distinctly, however, there was a quote in the drawing that struck a chord deeply with us. It said, "Life is just so daily." What a way to say it, right? Life is so daily.

That's how it goes, isn't it? We wake up in the morning, we tend to our morning routines. We finish that, and then we go about the matters of the day, which maybe vary, or are maybe very routine. Then we come to the close of the day, we take our time to make and eat dinner. We finish with those routines, we go to bed, and we do it all over again. Sure there are the days that are different, there are the days that break that, but there are still those things you have to worry about: eating, clothing, maybe work, or house chores. Washing dishes, washing clothes. Vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, dusting, rinse and repeat.

But what does our Lord Jesus warn us? **Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.** What's He say? He says, watch out in the midst of these cares, the cares of this life. Don't let them lull you into sleep where you think that's it. It's so easy when it's in front of your nose all the time to think that this day in and day out is it. Isn't it?

It's easy to get caught up in daily. And often when we get caught up in daily, it's easy to get caught up in other things too: dissipation and drunkenness, a treatment of the world as though it's only bearable with the medication of intoxicants. Or maybe it's not that, maybe it's the excitement of worldly things, of being entertained all the time, of seeking pleasures and comforts in this life all of the time.

It can even be an issue of seeking the fulfillment in the justification by our works. In the newsletter last month, I had Terry include an article from the Synod convention this past summer. That one was on prayer, but this week I read another one that put me to shame. This was one about giving thanks. As I say that, I'm thinking I'll reference it again in a week and a half when we're here for thanksgiving, but this was striking because it was written by the Rev. Dr. Gottfried Martens. Now Pastor Martens has received some recognition in the Lutheran World because of his congregation. You see, as he describes in the article, he was serving a congregation near Berlin that was very viable, had plenty of money, sufficient attendance, people he apparently got along with well, etc. Pastor Martens said he planned to retire at that congregation even. But then something happened. The refugees fleeing the Middle East began coming to that congregation and there were many who didn't want them there. Many of these refugees were Muslims and so they balked because of all of the concerns that go along with that.

But Pastor Martens saw a need for evangelism. When push came to shove, he finally had to leave that congregation and they bought an old church elsewhere in Berlin. That congregation is no over, I believe 600 strong in its membership, most of whom are converts from Islam.

Now we should be most thankful to God for that. That is awesome to see His work in that way. But what I said was that this was striking to me. And it was in two ways. First, because Pastor Martens made the point of his paper that it would be wrong for him to spend all of this time talking about how thankful he should be to God about that. It's not that he's not thankful, but it's that he needs to guard himself against the self-righteous thanking of God like the Pharisee does in the temple, the self-righteous, "Lord, I thank you that you've made me so good at pastoring." In other words, he is calling himself to be guarded against finding fulfillment in that pleasure of our good works, as I was describing when I brought up the article.

But equally pertinent were the ways in which these members of his could be caught up in life being so daily and they aren't. He's got one member who was baptized and was boldly confessing his faith. But when word got out where his wife and children are in Iran, they threatened to force a divorce and marry his wife to a Muslim man. The man knew he needed to get there and take his family out. As far as Pastor Martens knows, this man is somewhere in Turkey now with his family, unable to get back to Germany. Yet he still confesses faithfully.

Or there is the woman whose Christian father is still in Iran, imprisoned because of his faith. Daily they tell him he could be released if he would just denounce the faith. Daily he confesses Jesus.

Why are these things so striking? Why does this put me to shame? Because it's so easy to get caught up in that fact that life is so daily. And so it's easy to be distracted from what this world really is, from the attacks of the evil one, from the redemption that's ours.

And so we see Jesus warning us: Don't fall asleep, Christians! Be awake, be watchful!!!

Of course, as I say this, we see this warning happening in an interesting way in the lesson this morning, don't we? What do I mean? Well look at whole section of preaching, and see how it starts. What initiates this conversation? The people are looking at the temple, and they see the immensity and the beauty of it. They look at it and see the ornamentation that is so grand. Now, if you recall, first of all the temple is the heart of the worship in the Old Testament. When God gave Moses the covenant, He gave instructions for the tabernacle where the sacrifices would take place, where the priests would offer day in and day out, most importantly, where the ark was in the Holy of Holies. Eventually, that tabernacle was given a permanent home with the temple Solomon built. But that temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. It was later rebuilt, but what Jesus and the crowd with Him were looking at was the improvement on that second temple made by Herod the Great, the king who had tried to destroy Jesus through the slaughtering of the innocents in Bethlehem. This Herod had lavishly spent on the Temple so that it was a massive and grand structure. It had all of the glorious decoration you can imagine.

In fact as Jesus describes it, in this temple no rock was left unturned. You see this same beauty the crowd was drawn to was the beauty that brought the temple's destruction—at least in human terms. In 70 AD, when the Romans were upset with an attempted revolt by the Jews, they destroyed it. But because of all of the gold they turned over every rock to get all of the gold they could.

Now, as I say that, I mentioned that as the human cause. In theological terms, Jesus is making a connection. Here was the judgment against the Jews there for their rejection of Him. Here was this center of worship, given to them, but they missed the new center of worship. Where was that? The temple of this man standing before them, this Son of God. In this One there was no need for the temple. But the people were caught up in the daily of life. The temple and its beauty were the point for them.

But you see in Jesus there would be a shift, an end. An end to the old covenant. A new covenant in His blood. And in that covenant, He would be given authority and power. And there would be judgment. He warned them there to watch for it with the temple, this end. He said, **Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.** He describes there this time at the end of all with that covenant, the judgment against those there who got caught up in the daily.

But then do you see what He does in the sermon? He moves right into another end. He moves right into His return at the end of time: **And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.**

Now this seems so odd to us, this movement, because we see how distant these two things are in time. After all, the temple was destroyed in 70 and we're in 2019 without the return of Jesus yet. But you see this is all one act for God. As Peter says, God isn't slow in fulfilling this promise to come back. It seems like this is so long, but for God a day is as one thousand years, and one thousand years as a day. It seems so long in between, and it becomes in that so easy to get distracted with the thought that He's not coming, to be distracted with the daily. But don't. This is all one act for God, it's coming, it's coming quickly. Instead be watchful, as your Lord calls you to. And hear what He says: **then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**

Hear that Christians, because that is what will sustain you in the daily: your redemption is drawing near. The love of this Jesus who has entered into this world for us. The love of this Jesus who has born the sin of the world. The love of this Jesus who has born your sin, who for your sake became sin embodied on the cross that in His resurrection your forgiveness, your justification before God would become clear.

When we speak of the end, the judgment like this, as we do at the end of the Church Year, when we speak of the coming of our Lord in judgment, I think all of us tremble a bit. All of us look at that with a bit of discomfort. And because of our sin, we should. But this day of the Lord's coming, while it is terror for the enemy of the Lord Jesus and those who have rejected Him, this is joy, pure joy, for those who belong to Him. You are baptized with His Name upon you. He has fed you and nourished you with His very own body and blood. You belong to Him, this salvation is for you. Don't be distracted by this world which so far inferior. Instead, keep your eyes on Him, the Author and Perfecter of your faith. Why? Because He will come again to redeem you. Yes, life is daily, but His life is eternal, and therefore is far better. Keep watch. Raise your heads, your redemption is near. Amen.