

St. Matthew 24:14

And this Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

END OF THE WORLD

So, what is the big deal?

This is the Sunday of the Fulfillment – the Fulfillment of what? The Fulfillment of everything necessary for our redemption, which if we say we believe, teach, and confess only what the Scriptures say, then the hype and fear most of the world exhibits about the end of this age are only distractions. The real story that should command our attention has nothing to do with our feelings, perceptions, or anxieties about the --

END OF THE WORLD.

Even if this is the last day ... it's not about us. It's about Christ. And whether we live to see another sunrise and seek new opportunities to proclaim the good news of God everywhere we go, or not ... we stay focused on the cross! I know that some of you will be surprised to hear this, but when you browse through over 2,000 sermons prepared and preached by *Martin Luther* (1483-1546) in his lifetime, *not* one was about the --

END OF THE WORLD.

Every one that he did preach, however, was about Christ!

So, why worry about the (Gk: *telos*) the *end* of this distorted, often destructive world that has fallen far short of the glory God intended for it at creation? This final day of the year on the church calendar should not alarm us, nor should it ever replace the main focus of our faith – our eyes should never wander or stray too far from the cross. That is where our Lord finished the plan of redemption. That is where we find peace beyond the limits of our understanding and lasting joy amidst the chaos and confusion at the --

END OF THE WORLD.

The cross stands at the center of human history as the ultimate sign of salvation.

- Not the global breakdown of our eco-systems
- Not the universal suffering caused by man's inhumanity to man
- Not the moral decay of modern society
- Not the growing indifference to divine direction
- Not even the pollution of our planet

These are important causes. They demand a lot of attention. We may have strong feelings about certain ones, devoting portions of our time, energy, and money in an effort to do something. But the reality is – these things are only reminders that we are living in a fallen world, a once beautiful place called Eden now a vale of tears with all the ugly consequences of sin, which will be sorted out once and for all by Christ at the --

END OF THE WORLD.

Until then, we live by grace through faith on account of him. Our lives are not driven by fear of the unknown, anxiety over things we cannot change, evil oppression, or selfish ambition and insensitive thoughts, words, or behavior. We are forgiven people loved by God our heavenly Father for the sake of his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been redeemed, bought back, and given a second chance by the one who died for us on the cross. We have his righteousness, his life, his death as the ultimate sacrifice leading the way. We also have his resurrection as the divine guarantee of our redemption, now and forever, which means until the close of this age at the --

END OF THE WORLD.

Matthew is very thorough about this topic. In the verses just before our text the Jewish IRS man-turned-Christian evangelist presents a complete *checklist* of events that will happen before Jesus comes again. Some of you may have it memorized, but it is always good to be reminded that as our redemption draws closer there will be *five* kinds of trouble before the end.

- ☑ ***Trouble everywhere on earth.*** False messiahs (v. 5) charismatic leaders claiming to be the real deal, some calling themselves the Son of God, or Christ himself, will attract many followers and lead them astray, even to an early death. There will be wars and rumors of wars (v. 6), famines, and earthquakes (v. 7), and even worse like the tsunamis and typhoons making the news.
- ☑ ***Trouble especially for Christians.*** For those who stand up for Jesus, especially in public places there will be ridicule, hatred, persecution, and even execution (v. 9) like the terrible suffering of believers caught in the cross-fire of civil war in Syria.
- ☑ ***Trouble within the Christian Church.*** Divisions among church members will cause many to drop out, betray, or even hate those who claim to belong to the body of Christ (v. 11). The ones who initiate such mischief will cause some to reject the true faith.
- ☑ ***Trouble in the office of the Holy Ministry.*** False prophets will rise up; every generation will have its share of misguided preachers predicting the end of this world, which will distract or lead many people astray (v. 11). Some of our favorite heretics will preach secular humanism framed in Scripture language, with the same result – *people will never hear the truth.*
- ☑ ***Trouble in the local community.*** Lawlessness, better known as the law according to me, will deteriorate the foundation of moral, ethical behavior in society; while more and more become indifferent toward regular contact with the Word and Sacrament ministry of the Christian Church (v. 12). Only the faithful will be saved (v. 13), but even this truth will be ignored. After every effort is made to share the Gospel with all nations, then the time set and known only by our heavenly Father will come, a day we should be able to look forward to with a sense of relief, because we are focused on the cross, the sign of salvation at the --

END OF THE WORLD.

The Danish philosopher and theologian, *Soren Kierkegaard* (1813-1855) told a parable about the close of this age; he called it “The Fire.”

There was a variety show at the local theatre. Each show was more fantastic than the one before, and was applauded by the audience. All of a sudden the manager came on stage. He apologized for the interruption, but explained that the theatre was on fire. He begged his patrons to leave the theatre in an orderly fashion. The audience thought this was part of the show; in fact, they believed his proclamation about the fire was the most amusing turn of the evening, and cheered thunderously. Again the manager implored them to leave the burning building, but again he was applauded vigorously. At last he could do no more. The fire raced through the whole theatre and the fun loving audience with it.

Resource, July/ August 1990

“And so,” concluded *Kierkegaard*, “will our age, I sometimes think, go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators.”

Make no mistake about it. These are dangerous times. Everything on the checklist that Jesus said would happen, has happened. In fact, the five-fold trouble he described in the first century has been a reoccurring theme with each passing generation. Maybe we are living in the last days. Even if we’re not, his

words printed on the cover of today's bulletin serve to remind us: "... behold, the days are coming" (Luke 23:29). For him the end would be at three o'clock that same afternoon. For us perhaps some time in the near future; perhaps later today, or even tomorrow.

Martin Luther did leave us a short memo about the end.

Even if I knew that the world would come to an end tomorrow, I would nevertheless plant an apple tree. Let us live as though Christ were crucified yesterday, risen today, and coming again tomorrow.

The big deal has already happened at the cross.

Now, we look forward in faith to the --

END OF THE WORLD.

May the Holy Spirit keep us on the alert.

In Jesus' Name,
A M E N

Dr. Thomas Wm. Hirsch, Pastor
St. Paul Lutheran Church -- Grants Pass, Oregon