

Third Last Sunday, 2006  
Text: Matthew 24:15-28  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

Make no mistake: God is not nice. He is patient, he is merciful, he is Love beyond knowing – but he is not nice. He does not delight in mischief like an ornery grandpa in the sky. He does not wink away evil. He is holy and just. He delights not in the death of a sinner – but neither does he delight in sin. Rather he judges sin – and the wages of sin is death. For behold the terrible judgment that Jesus proclaims upon God's chosen city of Jerusalem today.

Jerusalem, the city of the great king, the place of the Temple, this holy place blessed and preserved and nurtured by God for centuries. Even this place that God had cared for so completely – even this place where the prophets lived – even this place, God destroyed in his holy wrath because they refused to repent, to turn from their sin and unbelief, and come to their Lord Jesus.

The Lord is no respecter of persons. He did not spare Jerusalem just because he had cared for her in the past. He has no nostalgic feelings toward you and your heritage either. If Jerusalem was not spared because of God's ancient and special

relationship with her, do not think that you will escape simply because you come from a Christian family.

No, the Lord is no respecter of persons and He was not nice to Jerusalem at all. He was patient with that city and its inhabitants. He was merciful to them for centuries and centuries. He sent them prophet after prophet to call them to their senses. But the people abused God's patience and took his mercy for granted. The people thought that things had always worked out well enough, so why should they get worried just because another prophet, this Jesus, foretold their doom again? But God had warned them. Their destruction should not have come as a surprise. The Lord himself had shed tears over Jerusalem begging her to repent, but she would not. And so for Jerusalem, the curtain came down. After one last generation of patient waiting, the Lord looked for the vine of Jerusalem to bear the fruit of repentance and faith and found none.

And so the Lord sent in the Roman army and destroyed that city and killed its inhabitants. Not one stone was left upon another. The Temple was cast down and Gentile soldiers stood on formerly holy ground where even high priests had feared to tread. And woe to those who were pregnant and nursing in those days! And woe to those killed in the streets as they ran down from their housetops! And woe to those who looked to false christs for salvation, and found none. Instead all these found out that God's judgment is as real and sharp as Roman steel and as gnawing and deadly as starvation. They found that God's patience had run out, that

they had abused his grace for too long, and that only wrath remained.

And yet what happened to Jerusalem in the year A+D 70 was only a shadow of the coming wrath of God at the end of days. Every hardship in this life is a shadow of this coming wrath. Not only Jerusalem's fall but every war, every earthquake, every hurricane, and disease: let them all be for you a solemn warning: God is not nice. He is loving and merciful and gracious and patient: but His patience comes to an end. So do not abuse his grace. Repent.

Yes repent, for today is still the day of salvation. You are not dead yet and the end has not yet come. So hasten. Rend your hearts and not your garments and turn to the Lord. For God does not delight in the death of a sinner. He does not want you to live under his wrath, but rather under his grace. So turn to him and find mercy. Do not think that you will escape the wrath of that Day by trying to justify yourself with flimsy excuses like, "I tried my best" or "I'm not as bad as some" or "I just did what I had to do." Just ask Jerusalem how well those excuses work. Instead, give up on impressing God and instead admit that nothing good lives in you, that is in your flesh, and throw yourself on the mercy of the Lord. For he is Mercy itself.

For look: where the corpse is, there is salvation. God loves you so much that he would rather pour out all of his destructive wrath on his only-begotten Son on the cross and turn him into a corpse rather than have that wrath fall on you. The christs that are found here or there, in the wilderness or in the inner rooms

performing their lying signs and wonders are not true christ. There is only one true Christ: and he can be found on a Roman cross suffering for you. Pouring himself out for you. Loving you to death so that death might have no fear for you.

Those who are in Christ have nothing to fear from the wrath of God against sin, because all of the wrath of God against sin has already been poured out upon Christ. With the Psalmist all those who are in Christ cry out to the Father: Behold our shield O God! Look upon the face your Anointed Christ! Yes, dear Father look upon the bruised and beaten and thorn pricked face of Jesus, our shield. Cover us with his righteousness that we might be saved.

Yes, find salvation in the Christ upon the cross – and look eagerly for his return. For that return at the end of days – which may come at any time – holds no fear for those who do look to the crucified Christ for their salvation. For those who are in Christ, that Day when Christ comes will be one of joy and resurrection. And in the meantime, come to his altar to receive a foretaste of that coming joy. Come receive the same body which was broken for you on the cross. Come receive the blood that covers all your iniquity and shields you from God's wrath. Come receive the risen body of Christ which is the sure promise of your resurrection. For where the Body is, there his saints will gather to receive him as their salvation.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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