

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Second Sunday in Advent (Populus Zion)

December 10, 2023

Text: Luke 21:25–36

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In our worship service two weeks ago, we considered the topic of Christ's return in glory on the Last Day. We gave special attention to I Thessalonians 5:1-11. In that great text, we learned afresh that the Day of the Lord will come unannounced like a thief coming in the night. Because of this truth, we should always be prepared for the Lord's Second Coming for we do not know the day nor the hour of His return. We stay prepared by nurturing our most holy faith in Jesus through the study and contemplation of God's Word, at home as well as in regular worship, receiving the Sacraments often, daily prayer, and very importantly, encouraging one another constantly to remain faithful and joyful in Christ. Living in the light of Christ's return, our day-to-day lives are to be characterized by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. In and through these virtues, we receive the forgiveness of sins, remain fervent in our hope of eternal life in Christ's kingdom, and continue to grow in our love for God, our family and friends, one another, even our enemies.

Once again, our attention returns to the doctrine of Christ's return in glory. But this time, the emphasis is on the condition of the world when He returns. Our Lord Himself said He is coming again, Luke 21:27, "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." The Second Coming of Jesus teaches us that human history not only has an end but a magnificent goal, a fulfillment. The doctrines of creation and the end of time must be held together, like hand in glove. In the beginning, God created the universe so that it would abide forever as the dwelling place of man with God. We were created to know and to love God in fellowship with one another and the rest of creation. Until we reach that great goal for which we were created and redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will

experience restlessness and longing. This intense desire to know God and to be with Him in perfect union fills our songs and hymns. “I’m but a stranger here, heav’n is my home” (LSB 748) Or, that great hymn from the Middle Ages, *Jerusalem the Golden* (LSB 672):

O sweet and blessed country, the home of God’s elect!  
 O sweet and blessed country that faithful hearts expect!  
 In mercy, Jesus, bring us To that eternal rest  
 With You and God the Father and Spirit, ever blest.

The third stanza of today’s sermon hymn, *Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending*, describes redeemed saints looking upon the crucifixion scars of the exalted Jesus with rapturous delight! (LSB 336). Christ’s second coming is the foundation and source of our Christian hope: to see God as He is and to be in perfect fellowship with Him. That’s the longing and expectation of the human heart redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

I want this great hope to be front and center in our thinking today, really every day until we take our last breath in this earthly life or Christ comes again in glory. The apostle Paul prayed as much for the Roman Christians in Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Paul wants Christians filled with the joy and peace given through believing in Jesus so that we can abound in hope. What hope? The hope found in God. The God who not only gives hope but is the source and focus of our hope.

Dear saints of God, it’s this hope, to see and be with God, this hope combined with joy and peace, that gives us the strength and courage to live faithful, godly lives on this side of eternity. Without this hope in God, we can’t be and remain Christians. In fact, the darkness and evil of the end times would swallow us up without the hope given to us by the Holy Spirit through Christ’s gospel. Yes, it’s that important.

The Lord Jesus Himself teaches us this great truth in Luke 21:25–36, today’s gospel reading. In vs. 25–28, our Lord teaches that in the last days, there will be all kinds of natural and supernatural signs in the universe and among nations. Vs. 26 highlights the intensity of fear people will face, “...people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” We must not underestimate the intensity and severity of the fear shaking the world.

Ever since man’s fall into sin, there has been evil, corruption, suffering, and death. But there is a growing, fearful realization amongst all people that the depth and magnitude of all these evils is simply overwhelming. The dark cloud of fear and foreboding continues to thicken with every new military conflict, every natural disaster, every economic change, and so forth. The fearmongering on television, radio, social media, and so forth is staggering. This is true across the political and cultural spectrum, right-left, conservative-liberal, religious-agnostic, etc. Because of this weaponization of fear, I encourage you to limit how much news and media you ingest, that includes visual, print, and audio. Stay informed. Absolutely. But a constant barrage of fear and anger is spiritually dangerous. The Bible teaches us to focus our mental and emotional energies on other things. In Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Think about those things that strengthen our hope in Christ and enliven our love for one another!! The opportunities to do that are virtually endless.

How are we to respond as Christians to such an environment of constant fear and foreboding? Vs. 28 from the gospel text (Luke 21), “Now when these things (i.e., all those fearful things seen in heavens and earth) begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” In other words, we the unbelieving world is bowing down under the weight of fear and anxiety, we Christians stand tall in hope. Raise your heads! Your redemption is drawing near. Christ is coming. Our hope,

that which fills heart and soul with longing and desire, the Lord Jesus Himself, is coming. He is our redemption. His death and resurrection secured our place in creation and the new creation. That's why the sermon hymn rightly pointed out the rapturous delight we will have gazing upon the glorious scars of Christ Jesus.

Later in the same context of Luke 21, Jesus warned us that the pressures, anxieties, and fears of life in this world will become so heavy that even Christians will be tempted to engage in sinful dissipation, drunkenness, and worrisome cares about life. Such weights will certainly weigh down the unbelieving world. But don't let it happen to you, says Jesus. Instead, Jesus directs us (vs. 36), to "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." We know these heavy, fearful things will take place. There's no getting around it. But Christians respond differently. With heads lifted high, we raise our voices in prayer and worship to the God of hope, joy, and peace.

What is our hope, our joy, our peace, our strength, our courage in the midst of a fear-filled world? Christ Jesus, the Son of Man who is coming again with power and great glory (Lk. 21:27). As we see all these things taking place, as we certainly are in our day, we "know that the kingdom of God is near" (vs. 31). Jesus has overcome the world for us. He has not only taken away all your sins – that's glorious in itself, but He also gives you His Holy Spirit. He is preparing a unique place for you in His kingdom. Because of Jesus, we know, believe, trust, and love the God of hope, peace, joy, and love. Isn't that what these banners behind me say? Such is what the season of Advent is all about. Those are gifts from the God who is love, hope, peace, and joy. May our longing hearts be filled with them.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.