

25th Sunday after Pentecost, 2010C
 513 “The Clouds of Judgment Gather”
 *508 “The Day is Surely Drawing Near”
 645 “Built on the Rock”

“Your Redemption is Drawing Near”

⁵While some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, [Jesus] said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ⁷And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”

⁸And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹²But 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. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²²for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

³⁴“But 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. ³⁵For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶But 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.” (Luke 21:5-36)

NICENE CREED

In the Nicene Creed, Christians everywhere confess that the Jesus Christ “will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.” This confession we confess because it is true

according to the Holy Scriptures, as heard in today's Gospel reading. The Lord Jesus will one day return, not in humility as before, being born of the virgin. When He comes again, He will come in glory. **Every eye will see Him**, the Bible says (Revelation 1:7).

CHRIST'S COMING—GOOD NEWS FOR CHRISTIANS, FEARFUL DAY FOR ALL OTHERS

This is good news indeed for all who long to be without sin, for all who desire God's mercy in Jesus. But for all others, the day of Christ's return will not be a welcome day. It will be a day of fear and dread. It will be a day of fear and dread because for those who in Christ do not believe, who ignore His calling now to repent and believe the Gospel, they will be called to account. For them, Christ's return is not for their salvation. It is for their judgment. But for the Christian, for the one who calls upon the Name of the Lord, who seeks God's favor through the obedience of His Son, Christ comes to bring them to Himself, to take home all who belong to Him.

BE READY

"The day is surely drawing near" (LSB 508). We know not when. Nor are we to try and figure out when that day will be. But our Lord does say 'to be ready, 'to watch', 'to not be weighed down with anxiety and the cares of this world'. Our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak (Mark 14:38).

Life is full of expectations, schedules, times, and seasons. For what we do expect, we do what we can to be ready. If we have an appointment, for example, we plan accordingly. If there's that deadline, then we know when the due date is to be and we can (ideally) schedule our time.

But there are also those times when we don't know *what's* coming—or *when* it's coming. Lest we want to be unprepared, we prepare ourselves for what we might expect. "Expect the worst, hope for the best."

THE LORD'S RETURN-THE WHEN WE DON'T KNOW; THAT HE IS WE DO

When it comes to our Lord's return, His Second Coming, we know He's coming. We just don't know when. Some speculate that we have plenty of time. After all, things have been going as they have been for quite awhile now. In the words of Peter, **Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation"** (2 Peter 3:3-4). In other words, nothing's really changed. People still die. The world still has its problems. Life goes on.

But to those who hold such ideas, Peter says, **This they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation (2 Peter 3:5-15).

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise... He is longsuffering toward us, Peter says, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Thus does our Lord continue to send preachers today, and thus does He have His church preach repentance and faith, Law and Gospel, turning from sin and believing in Christ, so that when our Lord does come, readiness will be the word of the day and not disregard; preparedness and not neglectfulness; and due consideration, not unconcern.

SIGNS OF JESUS' COMING

So how do we know how near Christ's coming is? What are the signs by which He would indicate to us that His approach is near? From today's Gospel text, Jesus tells us that there will be false prophets and teachers, they who would deceive from the truth (Luke 21:8). There will be wars, nations fighting against nations. There will be disasters such as earthquakes, and famines, and plagues. There will be persecutions and betrayals and even martyrdom for the name of Christ.

All of these things that Jesus told His disciples He told them that they might know that the end is near and be waiting. These words are also for us, now, who await our Lord's return. The war in Iraq, and now Afghanistan, continue. Rumors of other threats abound. Earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, and storms are plentiful. Hunger, poverty, the Aids epidemic. All of these show that the day of our Lord's return is soon approaching, even at our very doorstep.

False teachers are ever increasing. Society tries with all its might to silence the Name and the Word of Jesus while it allows for everything else under the sun, and even the faithful are sometimes tempted to dumb down their message, to hide where it's safe, and simply to be quiet for the sake of tranquility and peace.

Faithful pastors, people, and congregations are branded as old fashion and unloving because they speak the truth. They are set aside for what is new and trendy and for what is exciting and

tantalizing to our sinful human nature, like making us feel good about ourselves rather than calling sinners to repent and pointing to Christ who is our Savior.

Persecutions of the faithful are on the rise. Our **adversary the devil** really is walking **about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour** (1 Peter 5:8). **Satan himself** truly does transform **himself into an angel of light**, as do **False apostles, deceitful workers, transform themselves into apostles of Christ** (2 Corinthians 11:14, 13).

Apathy and indifference to false teaching, which indicates an apathy and indifference to the true doctrine, is taking greater root among even seasoned Christians. The fight is long and hard. Things aren't improving. The end doesn't seem to be in sight.

We avoid speaking the truth in love because of the possible offense that might be given (Ephesians 4:15). Heaven forbid if we appear unloving or politically incorrect if people don't like us!

Apathy to the hearing and studying of God's Word together, let alone with the pastor or the Sunday School teacher, is at an alarming rate. Hearts are growing colder to the love of God and His life-giving Word. Lack of concern for Biblical teaching and distinguishing God's Word from that which is not is increasing, too.

Church bodies and congregations compromise the faith and advance things that are contrary to God's Word, with little or no debate, and oppositional voices are muzzled.

All of these things are little different than they were before us. Just as they were in Jesus' day and just as they were in the early church, so they continue—until our Lord returns. But rather than slow down in speed, their pace seems quickening. Instead of times 'getting better', they're seem to be getting worse.

REASON FOR HOPE—YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR

Nevertheless, instead of worrying and becoming anxious, instead of despairing over what is in the world and the church today, instead of losing heart and giving in and giving up, Jesus says **Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near** (Luke 21:28). This is why we sing that great Advent hymn: "Lift up Your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold, the King of glory waits. The King of kings is drawing near. The Savior of the world is here. Life and salvation he doth bring; Therefore rejoice and gladly sing. To God the Father raise Your joyful songs of praise" (LSB 340/341 "Lift Up your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates").

For the Christian, and for the Christian only, the current troubling days and the troubling days ahead both outside the church and within the church are not cause to lose hope. Christ continues to be her head. Jesus gives nothing but sure the expectation of life everlasting to all who wait on Him. He is coming! Your suffering will soon end!

The Lord will judge your oppressors with righteous judgment. He will deliver you from the evil

foe. Indeed, He already has. Sin and death no longer have their stronghold over you. God the Father sent His Son to fulfill just this task. And He has. Jesus satisfied God's will for you and for me on the cross by willingly shedding His precious blood. He paid the debt in full, the debt which you were to pay but are unable because of your sin.

SINS FORGIVEN—ETERNAL SALVATION

Now—in Christ—your debt no longer remains. You don't need to take out a loan. No lien is necessary. There is no interest or hidden clause. Jesus paid it all. Through Him, your eternal salvation is locked in and sure.

Therefore, even with all that is going around you, in the world and in the church, live to God. Straighten up and raise your heads. The coming of the Lord Jesus means your redemption. The coming of the Lord Jesus means your salvation. He doesn't come to judge you, for having faith in Him, you already are judged. You are judged blameless and without sin.

Don't Despair—Take Courage

Because these things are so, despair not. Take courage. Be of good cheer (Matthew 9:2).

In Jesus you have peace with God and need not fear Christ's return. Rather, with eagerness and all expectation you await His coming in the clouds (Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27).

Therefore, **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory** (Colossians 3:2-4).

Instead of fretting and complaining how things are and despairing or worrying because of what you see, turn to Christ, pray, and wait upon Him. Believe His Word and His promise. Trust in the Lord. Seek first His Kingdom His righteousness, and watch; watch and stay awake, that you be ready for the coming of Your Lord.

You do this, you watch and stay awake—by having faith in His Word, having faith in Him who purchased you with His own precious blood. Therefore hear His Word, partake of the Sacrament, true food for your soul. Be fed with the bread of life, for by these does the Lord sustain, and by these does the Lord keep you.

Jesus comes to deliver you from this veil of tears. Your redemption is near. Rejoice and be glad, even if the world and everyone else do or think or believe otherwise. You are Christ's, and He is yours. Amen.