

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of November 22, 2009*

## The Preciousness of Faith (Mark 13:24-37)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. Our Lord says to us:

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>32</sup>But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. <sup>35</sup>Therefore stay awake."

This is the Word of God.

Dear friends in Christ, Fortune telling is big business. Every year people around the world invest thousands in things like tarot cards, horoscopes, palm readings, astrology, even crystal balls in some places. Many people are desperate to know the future. Some are just curious, some read their horoscope for a good laugh while in the back of their mind they are curious what will happen. Some people's curiosity even leads them to delve into the occult with things like Ouija boards. They say that curiosity killed the cat and how true it is with the occult.

Can we somehow benefit from knowing the future from these things? The simple answer to this is no. Another question is, do all these things really work? Do they carry any weight? The vast majority of these fortune telling businesses are little more than hocus-pocus scams and are not to be trusted. But even if they were accurate they must be avoided at all costs. And why is that? Because your faith is more precious than gold and God's Word is the only guide you need.

Jesus tells us everything we truly need to know about the future. He tells us to live by faith in Him. He tells us about the perhaps not so distant future, the Last Day. He says, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The disciples asked Jesus, "When will all these things take place." But Jesus only pointed to the signs that will accompany the end. He told them to be ready.

We live by timetables. We have alarm clocks to tell us when to rise and shine; calendars that tell us important dates; day-planners help us schedule our things each day. We wear wristwatches and have clocks in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in the living room...We love to know when things will begin and end so we can plan for them. But in this case, Jesus tells us to plan for Him everyday. He tells us to stay awake. We don't want His second coming to be a rude awakening like a noisy alarm clock when we are

in the dead of sleep. He wants us to be always watching, always alert and aware that He can return at any time to meet us.

But wouldn't it be nice to know just a little bit of the future before that happens. Wouldn't it help to know what will happen next month or next year or five years from now? Wouldn't that help us get ready and take the stress off things? You might think so but God's ways are not our ways. He sees beyond this immediate life. His vision is for eternity and He has our eternal welfare in mind.

God has made all things depend on faith. Whoever has faith in Christ has everything. But if we had a map of the future it would be a hindrance to faith and not a help. A man by the name of George Mueller, who was a Christian evangelist and director of orphanages, who cared for over 10,000 orphans during his lifetime once said, "God delights to increase the faith of His children...I say, and say it deliberately--trials, difficulties and sometimes defeat, are the very food of faith..." God uses adversity in our life as a way to nurture our faith, to grow our trust in Him, and strengthen our relationship with Him. If we were could live a life with no problems and no uncertainties then would we ever feel a real need for God?

This man George Mueller, who lived about 100 years ago, had a renowned prayer life. In his lifetime, he cared for thousands of orphans in five different homes. The homes together cost about \$250,000 to build and yet not once did he go into debt nor did he make requests for financial support. Many times, he received unsolicited food donations only hours before they were needed to feed the children. This served to strengthen his faith in God. He once said, "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends".

In the Gospel reading, our Lord Jesus tells us, "Stay awake". In other words, in spiritual terms, "Don't doze off", keep looking for Jesus, keep your eyes and thoughts fixed on Him. If the forgiveness of sins and salvation we have in Christ does not excite us and enliven our hope then we're starting to fall asleep. If we have a perspective that is ho-hum and we just go through the motions then we need a wake up call. God is willing to use adversity to wake His beloved children and keep them in the fold. He wants to invigorate us with His grace.

Have you ever noticed that the people who were most excited about their faith in the New Testament were those who were persecuted? In Acts 5 it says the Sanhedrin had the apostles flogged and they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, then and let them go. It then says "the apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. And day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ". The adversity they went through is when the rubber hit the road and they most fully realized the extraordinary treasure they had in Christ.

Our life is clearly full of problems, trials, tribulations and the trials and tribulations of the world will intensify as Jesus' return draws near. But we have hope in Jesus that no

matter what life throws our way His love will never leave us. He is faithful and He will return to deliver us. As Romans 8 says, "Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Let's not lose sight of this great God of love. May our service not be mechanical but inspired and motivated by the love and salvation we have in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away." If a meteor should hit the earth, if there should be a nuclear holocaust, if we should be persecuted for the faith we can be certain that God is still with us. This earth and created order are only temporary. God is preparing us and refining our precious faith for life in His heavenly kingdom where true life is found. His words will be fulfilled and He will return as promised. When He returns the pressures and trials and struggles of life will be brought to an end. What a glorious day that will be for His precious and beloved children! Let's not be caught napping. Let us pray:

Lord heavenly Father, we praise you for sending your Son to redeem us by His cross. We ask that you bless us to look with anticipation for His return. Forgive us for half hearted worship. We ask that you reinvigorate our faith, enliven our spirits so we may rejoice in your grace in Christ even in the midst of adversity. We thank you for your love that never leaves us and we look forward the glory that will be revealed at the Second Coming. Amen and amen. And so, friends, with one mind and heart as one body in Christ we say, "Come, Lord Jesus".

Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.