

## **WATCHFULNESS IN PEACE**

Hear the Word of the Lord for this second Sunday of the Advent of our God:

*All of you must continue to be awake in all seasons, continuing to request that all of you might be able to flee all these things about to become; and to be stood before the Son of Man.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

From last week's proclamation of the Hope we have in Jesus' Triumphal entrance into Jerusalem to "Save Now!" God has, in His grace, brought us to the week of Peace in the Advent season. Those among us who have received God's gifts on this Sunday for the past several years recall that this Peace Sunday is one in which the readings call us to watchfulness for Christ Jesus coming, in bodily form, on the Last Day.

So, watchfulness in peace is the biblical concept in which we are being built up into through the readings' proclamations of Christ this week. Yet, throughout the lifetimes of every person present today, we have been living in an era of no peace, and declining biblical watchfulness. Such is the reality of our age.

The first part of our biblical theme for this week, "no peace," is exemplified as a baptized, therefore, Christian four-year-old, in a bedtime chat, gazing at the moon and the stars out his window, learned of the first moon landing. His next question as he tried to place that event in the ancient history of his nation is telling. To a mother not even born when Neil Armstrong took "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," the preschooler reportedly said, "What battle was that during?" (Just one answer to his question is: "Operation Mighty Play" in Vietnam)<sup>2</sup>. We are living in an age of no worldly peace, so we need to hear today's truly ancient readings, to remind us of Jesus' teaching for His people:

*All of you must continue to be awake in all seasons, continuing to request that all of you might be able to flee all these things about to become; and to be stood before the Son of Man.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 21:36.

<sup>2</sup> Inernet. <http://www.oocities.org/Pentagon/5791/ops.html>, accessed December 6, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 21:36.

Among those whom God gathered here today to give them His gifts of peace in wakefulness are a select handful of men. Because of “a date which will live in infamy,” they donned military uniforms. They set aside their personal peace and answered their nation’s call to arms. They learned what wakefulness in the face of determined enemies means when fighting worldly evil. Because of the bonds which tied them to other watchers against very bad people, we are here today, able to receive God’s gifts in this place in worldly peace and security.

That last thought is important for those who have, as did Louise today, donned the full armor of God given to those who stand in Christ’s Church Militant. God has joined her, wearing a white robe which symbolizes that in Jesus her sins are washed away, to the countless hosts in God’s eternal Army. Those eternal saints and angels we cannot with our eyes behold even now surround us. Yet, they are here with the Word.

God has declared Louise worthy, through His Means of Grace, to stand before Jesus. As she remains in His Word, He will give her, as He gives to all baptized believers, His power to fight the good fight of the Faith. Then, at last, as one who is joined to the whole host of God in heaven and on earth through baptismal participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, she will, one day, eternally join the innumerable hosts that surround God’s heavenly throne. Up to that day, Jesus reminds all of us:

*There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity; roaring of sea and waves; continual fainting of men from fear and expectation of the thing continually coming upon the inhabited world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.<sup>4</sup>*

That does not sound like peace on earth for the baptized, does it?

In fact, it is a description of earthly reality which has been working itself out globally among peoples particularly since the prophecy which comes before it was fulfilled. Without going into that text too deeply, for it is not before you (you may look

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 21:25—26.

up the context of today's Gospel after this Lord's Service) suffice it to say that Jesus' prophecy in that text was fulfilled. The destruction of Herod's Temple and first century Judea actually happened, in that order, during the years we date AD 70 and AD 136.

So, with Jesus' words about the destruction of Jerusalem and its environs completed by the Roman armies in the early second century AD, Christians could cling with reinforced earthly certainty to the prophecies of today's text. Jesus' words to us today follow on His Word successfully passing the Old Covenant test of a true prophet.<sup>5</sup> His words before have come true; thus His Word which follows shall also be completed.

We can look back into the records for the past nineteen centuries and readily discover that Jesus' promise of celestial signs, earthly distresses, and nations in trouble as the Last Day nears have been observed by people in apparent increasing intensity over the centuries. I say, "apparent," because we are, as are all people, creatures of the time in which we live.

Think about the historical realities of the fulfillment of Jesus' words which are found even now among those with whom this congregation has contact. There are a few people living in our city who were born before or during the War to end all Wars. A small handful of our church members were born before the Category 4 Great Miami hurricane ravaged the shores of Florida in 1926. A diminishing number of our members can remember living through the world's Great Depression and Dust Bowl of the late 1920s into the 1930s. As each generation rises, many of us can remember World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom. Even the tiniest infant among us is living through the era of Operation Enduring Freedom. A majority of us can remember, way back at the beginning of the 1980s, when the long-dormant volcano named Mount Saint Helens erupted. More of us may recall the devastations of Hurricanes Andrew (way back in '92) and Katrina (nine years ago). All of us can view images of Super Typhoon Hagupit (Ruby) today as people in the Philippines

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<sup>5</sup> cf. *Deut.* 13:1f, 18:15f.

ready for its onslaught. We could go on in remembering the signs in the celestial bodies, among the nations, in the wind and waves that have taken place in our own lifetimes.

Yet, the reality is, for centuries, Jesus' prophecies about the events leading up to the Last Day have been occurring. Those who are aware of the full counsel of God given through His revealed Word know that Jesus does not give a set timeline for the events which lead up to this promise:

*And then, they will see the Son of Man continually coming in cloud with power and much glory.<sup>6</sup>*

Those among us who know the time frame of the first utterance of those words, understand that those who heard it for the first time had not yet seen the Lord, risen from the dead, ascend into heaven hidden by the clouds. Yes, three of them had witnessed Him in His glory in the shining cloud on the mountaintop during His Transfiguration (more about that will be proclaimed here as the season of Epiphany transitions into pre-Lent). But, they were often without understanding.

So, to those who were about to witness Jesus' passion and death, He was declaring the signs which would come before His final return to earth in power and glory. They did not have the evidences of history to which you can point to verify the fulfillment of many of Jesus' prophecies. They did not have the full outpouring that all the baptized, after Jesus' death and resurrection, receive – the Holy Spirit.

He reveals the Christ for Who He is to those who hear the Word, to those whom He grants the Faith. The Spirit of the Living God, given today to one of our newest congregational members, affirmed today at the Campus Christian Center by another new confessing Lutheran, has worked through God's Word for millennia to declare to the faithful that God is coming. In this week's Psalm, written about a thousand years before the Son of God came in the flesh, the Spirit declares:

*Our Elohe comes, and He does not keep silent;  
fire devours before His Face,*

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 21:27.

*and round about Him (it is) exceedingly tempestuous.<sup>7</sup>*

About 550 years after that, and 450 years before Jesus gave the prophecies you are hearing today, the Holy Spirit moved the prophet Malachi to write:

*“For behold! The day comes, burning as (an) oven,  
and all the insolent ones and all the ones doing evil (will be) stubble;  
and the coming Day will set them ablaze,” says YHWH Sabaoth,  
“which will not leave to them root and branches!”<sup>8</sup>*

By now, you dear Christians, surely have the idea forming or developing, that we have been continually given signs in this fallen Creation to watch for as the fiery Day of the Lord comes. You have heard that such calls to watchfulness, from today’s readings alone, have been given for more than 3,000 years. The first part of the weekly theme of watchfulness in peace should be apparent to you. You might even have begun to set aside your fears that this might be the time when our Lord fulfills all He has promised in returning to earth. Hopefully, you have grasped the reality that God’s call to His people to faithful watching is part and parcel of our daily lives in Christ.

Maybe you have begun to repent of your sinful worrying about rising up future generations to lives that may be worse than you have had. All the historical remembrances given earlier were stated to declare that Creation has been suffering from the effects of Adam’s Fall for a long, long, time. Our Christian century is no more or less special than any era of the Church. As with all the generations of the faithful before us, and any generations which follow us, we are simply called to watchfulness, in peace.

“Peace!” you say, “We have just heard about all kinds of calamities, and that the Last Day is coming in fire! Where is the peace of this season?” (If that is all you are thinking, you are going to be really prepared for next week’s Rose color and Joy proclamations)! Yet, there is peace for the faithful in Christ in His Word for this week. Jesus continues to say:

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 50:3.

<sup>8</sup> Malachi 3:19 MT (4:1).

*Thus, also, all of you, when you all behold these things becoming, all of you know that near remains the Kingdom of God.*

*Truly, truly I say to all of you, "Definitely not may this generation pass away until whenever all things become. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words definitely not will pass away."<sup>9</sup>*

Jesus' concluding words of that passage are given to bring you peace. The signs and wonders He prophesied, which have been being fulfilled, are given that you might know that God is not remote, distant, uncaring. They show that God's kingdom remains near to us. He declares that the generation of mankind will not end until all His Words come to be.

That means, when you witness signs in the heavens, when you hear of wars and struggles of nations, whenever the vagaries of wind and wave bring calamity, when you hear of people fainting for fear of what is happening in this fallen world, you know that Jesus' Word remains for you and all believers. That which Jesus declared the faithful may witness, when you do so, either with your own senses or the sense of history, you are given strength to stand in His Presence when He comes.

You have peace in knowing that the Son of Man, Jesus, is coming for us. He Who has died to bring you forgiveness, Who rose to declare you right with the Father, Who ascended into the heavens in the clouds, is returning for us. He who is our Head, has joined you to Him in His Body. You have been declared One with God in Christ, and His Word of promise to come for you is real.

You know that His Word to return for you on the Last Day is true because you have His fulfilled Word that He comes to you now. The Son of Man, Jesus, the Son of God, has come today to you with His Word. He has come to the newly baptized as she died and rose to new life in Him in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. Jesus comes to you with His cleansing fire, His Holy Absolution which burns away the sin in you. Jesus is now coming to you, in earthly elements of Bread and Wine. Here, He will give you a

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 21:31-33.

bodily touch of His eternal Peace – the knowledge that in Him you are again pure before the Father. These are His means to lift you up to watchfulness in His peace...

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Advent II, Populus Zion (LSB One-year Series)

Psalm 50: 1-15; Malachi 3:19-24 *MT*; Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 7, 2014

*Pastor Michael H. Merchouse*

***Solī Deo Glōria***