

***These Things Will Take Place, BUT...***

***Malachi 4: 1-2a; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13; Luke 21: 5-19***

Pentecost 23

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Zion Lutheran Church of Union Deposit

**Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ!**

**Amen.** “Hello darkness, my old friend; I’ve come to talk with you again.” Do you recognize these words? They are from a very famous song, “The Sound of Silence,” that was released in 1964. It was written by Paul Simon and recorded by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. The song was re-released in 2015, and sung by a group called Disturbed. The song laments the distance that exists between people and the sadness we feel when our voices go unheard.

This is the time of the year when we might feel the darkness setting in on us. The days are getting shorter, the nights are growing colder, and thoughts of doom and gloom might creep into our hearts. The holidays are right around the corner and we might feel anxiety because of work that needs to be done, bills that need to be paid, and relationships that might be tested over the holidays. We might feel sad that everyone else is celebrating, and we can feel only sadness.

I did warn you that today’s Scripture readings would be kind of a downer. Today we hear that “nation will rise against nation” and that there will be earthquakes and famines. Today’s bulletin cover shows the ruins from the ancient Greek city of

Eleia, or ancient Olympia, where the Olympic games were first held. The verse from Luke *not one stone will be left upon another* leaves us with a sense of foreboding. Metaphorically, this picture is a reminder of an undeniable truth in our human lives. Namely, death and destruction are a part of every life, just as birth and joy and renewal are a part what it means to be human.

But our good news from Jesus today is that we do not have to give in to the doom and gloom that everyone loves to predict. Malachi, whose name means “my servant,” tells us that the Lord of hosts will be with us and bring us healing to those who revere the name of the Lord. In our second lesson, the Apostle Paul tells us not to be weary of doing what is right, and by this we can be examples for other people to imitate. And Jesus tells us in the gospel reading that even if we are persecuted for our faith, our suffering can work for good. He says, *This will give you an opportunity to testify*.

The world might be full of suffering and bad news, and sometimes it feels like the darkness is taking over. But Jesus reminds us that destruction, chaos, and change are all inevitable. The blessing is that the dark times give us an opportunity to testify to the good news of the Lord. And our hard work will pay off. Jesus tells the disciples, and us, to beware that we are not led astray. Many will come in his name and claim to speak for God. We need to be wise and to keep our faith.

The thing that unites us as Christians is the gospel, the Word of God, carried out and proclaimed in the name of Christ. Even in those times and places where people predict chaos and destruction, we can share our stories of healing and serve as role models of healing. You don't have to walk around town wearing a t-shirt that says "I love Jesus" to get message of peace and hope across. You can just speak from your heart and tell your story. You can always share what your faith means to you and this will give people hope.

Friends, this is a unique moment in time and we are in a unique position in the church to have a great impact on our community and the world. What we say and do as Christians really does matter. We can be instruments of peace for our nation. We can use what we have learned as followers of Christ to help heal the political divide. Do you believe me? Think about it. We have been taught forgiveness and mercy. We know that reconciliation takes place one person at a time and one loving act of kindness at a time. We know that patience and understanding will heal whereas violence will only cause more violence. We have the tools that our world needs to move forward, as one, into a bright future where we know that God is in charge.

Very often, our own church leaders fall into the trap of believing the gloom and doom themselves. I've even heard stories about congregations in our synod where

leaders say, “Look at **that** church. At the rate they are going, they won’t be around in 5 years.” And guess what? Those congregations are still around, and they are still thriving. There **has** been a seismic population and cultural shift that has occurred, and some churches have closed, but others have re-examined their mission and taken new approaches to ministry.

Some churches have sold their buildings (which were too old, too large, and too expensive to maintain) and they have begun new ministries that grew out of feeding programs. Zion’s shift from the pastor-living-in-the-parsonage model has allowed us to focus more on helping people rather than just keeping the lights on. Other congregations have gone building-free in order to keep overhead costs down and ministry focus up.

The truth is, we don’t know what the future holds. And any time we try to imagine the future, what do we do? We imagine the absolute worst-case scenario. Right? Someone recently reminded me that 80% or 90% of the terrible things we imagine will probably never happen. And even if 10% of the worst case does occur, we will figure out a way to deal with it. And we will not be alone.

This is what Jesus is trying to tell this to the disciples. Do not be afraid when doom and gloom threaten. *Beware that you are not led astray.* Do not listen to the false prophets who predict only gloom and doom. Instead, trust the Lord.

Our God is with us and God will give us the strength that we need to persevere.

Use your challenges as an opportunity to testify to the mighty acts of our Lord. Do not be consumed by worry. Only God knows what the future holds, and that future is in God's hands. Jesus also says, *...not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.* To that I have to say, thanks be to God, and **Amen.**