

Sermon for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

‘And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.’

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Having summoned His disciples over to Himself before the treasury, Our Lord has spoken to them of the Widow who have given up her whole life as an offering of two copper coins to the Temple. He did not do this to teach His brothers of the good of giving more, but of the One who will give all.

Now again, the Lord is asked *by one of the disciples*, ‘Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Now this He teaches, that through the offering of the One sacrifice, the House of Sacrifice itself shall soon be passing away, or perhaps that its time shall be complete, and it too shall descend to the house of its fathers, the House of Solomon and the Tabernacle that came before it. This the author of Hebrews relates to us, writing that: *‘when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.’*

Yet His circuit about the environs of the Temple is not yet complete, for while resting upon the Mount of Olives, the Disciples ask an obvious question: if the final sacrifice is coming, and the Temple is soon to be done away with, and the Kingdom to be manifested among us, when, then, shall this happen? When will the End come?

“See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of

wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them... And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say... And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

Our Lord speaks, it would seem, counterproductively. He speaks of the coming of every earthly evil. Of *wars and rumors of war*, of rivalry between peoples and kings and nations. Of disaster and rebellion within the earth. He tells of His own disciples’ coming deliverance over to their enemies, their defilement and humiliation and death, at the hands of *brother and sister and mother and father, before councils and synagogues and governors and kings*.

And all this He concludes with the repetitive admonition: *do not be anxious*.

Unlike the kind mother holding the hand of a child about to learn to overcome a new feat, who assuages the fear of the young one with assurances that all will be okay, our Lord consoles us with the promise of our coming dark and harrowing demise before the witness of all the world.

If by this we are to be comforted, comforted we are not. Nor are we in such words made more able to obey our Lord’s precept to *be not afraid*, neither to *be alarmed*. It would perhaps behoove the Christ to take a modern course offered in one of our many prestigious colleges in Communications or Leadership, or perhaps Human Psychology. Such is not the way to encourage those already afraid and reticent to follow. Such words can do nothing but create more fear, more reticence, more dread.

Indeed, we know that His words enacted exactly that. When faced with betrayal and persecution before the face of our Lord, *and for His name’s sake*, in the Garden of Agony and in the midst of the Holy City, did the disciples not all flee? Did they not renounce His name thrice before the bird’s call? Even the rich young

man, desiring deeply to follow the Law of God, runs away from what is required of him, and indeed, with great anxiety, and in great fear; and naked nonetheless, for in his forsaking of the Lord, there is no other shame to be uncovered.

And yet, how could they not run? Or how could you and I remain? Are we any better than they? Do you have such pride, as so many High School students seem to have when they proclaim that if they were there in Germany during 1939, they would have not obeyed, that if you were asked by the little child if *you are one of them*, that you would have not said *no, I never knew him?*

Indeed, we are not so brave, we, who step three strides to the side after introducing our loud-mouth uncle to our friends to distance ourselves from the opinion he is about to espouse, surely brilliant in its lucidity, and surely brilliant all the more in its offensiveness.

If we will not stand beside a relative making small talk, will we endure the Christ and His talk of judging the nations and making the world His footstool, of destroying the Temple in three days and claiming the deity for Himself? You, too, will step aside.

Indeed, Christ's promise that *the one who endures to the end will be saved* is pale comfort, seeing as how this assurance is given *after* the assurance that we will be *put to death and hated by all*. What is salvation to the dead, when *in Sheol, there is no praise of God?*

The Lord goes on to speak of many other terrifying things, and then seems to get up and be on His way to meet some woman who shall wash His feet, being entirely satisfied that His disciples have understood nothing at all, and without understanding they shall remain.

Of course they should not understand. No one understands a good story by its beginning. It is the conclusion which brings comprehension.

For even as Christ, the widow, stands before the Temple, to offer His whole life as *the single sacrifice, once for all*, so then He observed the beauty of the Temple's edifices and walls and courts, contemplating how soon, and very soon, the *temple of His body* shall not have one stone upon another, but shall be torn and bled and struck and pierced.

And as the Twelve ask Him how this will come to pass, He speaks quite clearly, if they only knew He spoke first of Himself.

He will be handed over to councils and synagogues, to be tried in the false courts of kings and governors, betrayed by His disciples which He called brothers, and turned over by His own flesh and blood which *would not do His Father's will, hated by all, to be put to death, even death upon a cross.*

Yet He has a promise from the Father, and therefore has no anxiety, neither any fear, for it is written:

*The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*

So let there be the death of a one, that one might inherit by death *the ends of the earth, the heathen and all the nations.* Yet as all the deaths of the sacrifices of the Temple were made one in Christ, now the death and inheritor of the wealth of God shall be the same Christ.

Indeed, in three days *the one who endures will be saved, even as in three days, the temple shall be rebuilt.* Shall the Son fear? Not at all, for it is written: *'because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.'*

You too, dear Christian, will see wars, and rumors of war; and yet the time is not yet. You too will see trial and disaster; and yet the time has not come. For your faith, you will be mocked and betrayed, hated and spat upon; some may even die. But do not be afraid, *neither let your heart be saddened.* For all *mourning shall be turned to joy, for weeping is cast for the night, but joy comes in the morning.*

For with your own mouth, you confess it: *I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*

So as a priest in this world, offer yourself as a living sacrifice, though not for sin, for Christ alone has atoned for all; but rather that you too may follow Him through temptation in this life, humility in death, rest in the grave, and glory as glory given only to those that *endure, even endure to the end.*

And indeed, you will be glorified with the raiment of Christ our God, for the song He sings, He even sings of you:

*'For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.'*

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-13.