

Sermon for the Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:29-31).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Today,
Jesus gives us this parable of the blooming fig tree as a symbol of joyful expectation.

A better day is coming!

The
final Advent of our Lord is near.

In the
meantime, of course, the world spirals in chaos:

The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light.

The stars will fall
from heaven, and there will be winds and waves like nothing we have ever seen upon the oceans.

There
will be wars, famine, earthquakes and floods –

and as we see these
disasters unfolding around us, Jesus us tells us to stay awake, to pray,

and
to think about the fig tree in bloom!

And I

guess the question is, how can such destruction and devastation be compared to a blooming fig tree?

Doesn't this sound more like the stuff of that fig tree Jesus once cursed?

How can Jesus tell us to look upon such chaos and destruction in the positive light of a tree in new bloom?

This is exactly what the *wicked* world wonders.

For when the *world* sees these disastrous things happening, they are devastated.

Here, Jesus describes the end of this world – a world full of the material things and organizations and activities that people love.

He describes the end of all our possessions: all of our houses and gadgets, our cities and nations, our investments and bank accounts,

everything we have!

And for those who do not believe in Jesus,

who seek contentment and happiness and identity, meaning, and purpose in these things rather than in Christ and His cross will be devastated when Jesus comes to remove the cross from His Church and destroy everything in this world.

They will be devastated because they have loved the creation, and not the Creator.

They will be

devastated because everything they have lived and worked for will go up in smoke,
and what they have despised will come on the clouds of glory to judge them.

Of
course, those who trust in Jesus have an entirely different understanding of that Day.

For it will be, as Jesus says, like the blooming fig tree.

The fig
tree in bloom means that summer is coming, that the sun is going to shine and things are going to be green and beautiful again.

The blooming fig tree is a symbol of joy, of redemption,
of the Second Coming
of the Sun of Righteousness who will usher His saints into the glorious kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world.

And so,
for those who trust in Christ, the destruction of this world is merely the sign of a new beginning -

a new heaven and a new earth to come.

It will not
demoralize those who trust in Jesus because, while they certainly enjoy many things in this world, they do not worship them.

The
fact that there will be no more Ole Miss or State games will not bother them, for they will have Jesus.

The fact that our
nation and all her institutions will come to a screeching end will not alarm them, for they will have Jesus.

The fact that their
video games and I-Pads and all the things they have accumulated will be burnt

up will not bring their life to ruin, for they will have Jesus!

And so,

as they see these things, they will straighten up and raise their heads because their Redeemer is drawing near –

Jesus is drawing near with all the blessings that He has promised to give.

And

just as the blooming fig tree points to summer, so the destruction around us should point us to the everlasting summer to come for those who trust in Christ.

But

perhaps this is a good time to ask ourselves, “Would I really rather have Jesus than a fine meal and a ball game with friends?

Would I really rather

have Jesus than my family and all I hold dear in this life?

Would I really

rather have Jesus than my house and retirement savings and all the things I have accumulated for myself in this world?

Does

the loss of family, home, savings and everything sound like a nightmare,

or does it actually point me to everlasting joy with my Lord Jesus?

If I

had to choose right now, what would I choose?”

Well,

the answer is obvious, of course!

If this were a Sunday

School class or Confirmation Quiz, you pick Jesus, right?

But if

we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that in our *lives* we have frequently chosen differently...

That is, after all,
what we do whenever we think anything is more important in this world than taking our place at the Communion on the sabbath, right?

It's what we do
whenever we occupy our minds with coveting and desiring the next best thing in this world instead of being content with our lot in life and setting our minds on the treasures of heaven.

It's what we do
every day that we eat, drink, work and play without ever once returning to the Word of God and prayer.

Did you
read the Scriptures yesterday? What about the day before?

Did you ever look
once at this week's memory verse, let alone consider committing it to heart?

Have you prayed at all
this week? Have you said the Lord's prayer even once?

I know this is harsh, but today IS a wake-up call! Jesus says,

*"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.*

*For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the
whole earth.*

*But 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 21:34-36).*

If we
are honest with ourselves and consider the depths of our sin and how the cares
of this life have weighed us down,

perhaps we *should*
think upon the tree that Jesus cursed...

I mean,
when Judgment Day comes, can we really stand before Him with our heads held
high?

If we have loved this
creation more than our Creator, how can we compare His coming to the lovely
promise of the fig tree in bloom?

Well...
It is only because there is another tree besides the fig tree -

a tree that is more than just a happy reminder of good days
to come -

a tree that stands
forever as evidence that you are redeemed and saved.

It is
the tree that blossoms on Good Friday, the cross of Christ.

For on that tree Jesus was hanged and judged as the sinner in
your stead.

His
Father in heaven said, "Go, My beloved Child, and save them.

Take their punishment.

Die
on the tree so that they might live forever."

And out
of love for His Father, out of His love for you, our Lord Jesus willingly obeyed.

His righteous life was given for our careless lives.

His
perfect obedience was offered as a sacrifice for your sin.

The
tree of the cross is more than just a reminder of Good Friday –

It is forever the Tree of Life.

For on that tree
Jesus was judged for you, so that you are now judged through Him and through
what He has done FOR you.

It is
this judgment that you receive in the Divine Service here today.

Just a
short while ago, you confessed your sin;

you confessed that
you are by nature sinful and unclean, and that you have sinned against God in
thought, word, and deed.

And did
you hear the condemnation that followed?

Did I cry out, “Guilty! You are ALL guilty?”

No! For
even though you and I *are* guilty, we receive instead the fruit that
comes from the Tree of Life –

the promise that comes from the cross of Christ:

“I
forgive you all your sins.”

Because
Jesus died for you, the Father declares you, “Not guilty!”

And so, you ARE righteous in His sight.

And

what about Judgment Day? Will you be able to stand before the Son of Man when He comes?

The fact is, you

stand before Him even *now* as you come before this altar and receive His body and blood for your forgiveness.

You stand before Him

even *now* as the Baptized who bear the mark of His forgiveness.

This

Word and these Sacraments are His instruments by which He judges you here and

now, that you may stand before Him when He comes again in glory.

So keep

watch.

For Jesus does not

want your hearts to be weighed down with the cares of this life.

“Heaven and earth

will pass away” (21:33), as He promises, and on that Day no one is going to regret missing some sporting event or not having a bigger house or car.

But many WILL regret

not having held fast the Word of Christ!

Stay

awake, and pray that God would give you “strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Stay awake, and

rejoice even in the signs of chaos that surround you as you compare them to the wonder of a tree in bloom and the promise of new life to come.

Stay awake, that in

the end, you may behold your Savior face to face, and, “leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal 4:2),

enter with Him into
the resurrection and life everlasting in the world to come.

In
the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Luke 21:5-36