

Sunday, November 12, 2023
The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

“Let the Reader Understand – Prepare!”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare! It's a common warning that we hear in this day and age quite often. If you think back to last August, just a couple of months ago. We heard that there was a new strain of COVID. We needed to prepare, we needed to mask up, we needed to start isolating. We needed to get vaccinated and well we didn't hear about hardly anybody getting sick.

Back in November of 2022, our governor came out and expressed that since we were in a La Nina year, after two years of drought, this law Medina and enhanced by climate change was going to be catastrophic, unprecedented. And so, he called for an immediate 15% reduction in the use of water. And we better get ready. It's probably going to have to go up to 35% if we didn't take those steps immediately. I remember we prayed specifically about that in church.

And what happened? A week later we had our first storm and well, it just kind of kept on coming, especially in January, which led to another warning in April of this year, due to the unprecedented level of water that we received, there was going to be enormous growth in the forests and in the sage lands and in the grasslands, and the fire season of 2023 being fueled by climate change and higher temperatures, of course, would be epic. It didn't happen that way. It wasn't catastrophic. It wasn't unprecedented. In fact, it was one of the best fire seasons we've ever had. And of course, just last month we heard that there's an El Nino forming and in fact it's not forming. It has formed and it is being enhanced by climate change, and we need to be ready because there's going to be catastrophic floods, unprecedented water. And it's going to be a disaster if we don't prepare.

Prepare. It literally is a message also found in the church year. These last three weeks of Pentecost are devoted to preparing, preparing because Jesus is coming. The end is near. But how do you prepare for something like that? I think the key is found in Jesus's own words in Matthew chapter 24 and 25, where he speaks about the end times. And I think we can focus on one verse in particular, in chapter 24, verse 15 where He speaks about the abomination of desolation, but then he says 'let the reader understand.' Matthew puts that in there, let the reader understand. We need to look at this from a biblical standpoint and not from the standpoint of man's knowledge and thought.

So, let's take a look at Matthew 24 and let's be the readers and let's understand what's there. Matthew 24 is Jesus's words that He spoke, likely on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Now, how can I say that it was kind of fun doing the sermon, I had to do a little forensic work. We know that on Palm Sunday He arrived in Jerusalem, and we know that from there He went to the temple. But it's in Mark Chapter 11 that we read that because it was late, He left. He came, He looked at the temple, and said, James, John, Peter, it is late. Let's go. They left. Then the next day, as Mark writes, in Mark 11:12. He came back and that's when he turned over the tables of the money changers, and he began to teach using parables. The Pharisees and the Sadducees we read, perceived that he was speaking against them.

So, what happened? Well, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they got together in their own groups, and they decided to try to challenge Jesus. The Pharisees came with that question. Are we supposed to pay taxes to Ceasar? Jesus said 'give me a coin; render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' The Sadducees saw that he had confounded those Pharisees and so they came back with this ridiculous account of three brothers who all were married to one woman and all of them died before she died. So, whose wife is she in heaven? And Jesus comes back with? Have you not read the scriptures? Do you not understand? And He just puts that whole thing to rest.

Well, when the Pharisees heard that the Sadducees had struck out too, they met together again, and they came up with another great

question. And they came and they asked Jesus. And there are those who contend this was actually Saint Paul who was a Pharisee, who questioned Jesus. "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus responds. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. And the second is like it. You should love your neighbor as yourself." But Jesus didn't stop. He kept going. And now he asked them questions. You see, they wanted to engage Him in rabbinical teaching, questioning. And Jesus comes back and says, no, I'll ask you- "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is he?" They came right back with, 'King David's.' And that's when Jesus says to them. "How then is it that King David says, 'the Lord God said to my lord, King David's, Savior, sit at my right hand.'" And so, He looks at those Pharisees and he said; "so if King David calls him Lord, how can he be David's son? And we read that they dared not ask him anymore questions. And that's when Jesus launches into the seven woes the condemnation of the scribes and the Pharisees. Woe to you, Pharisees, you teachers of the law, woe you Scribes and Pharisees.

And at the end of Tuesday, quite a busy day, we see Jesus going to leave and He gets across from Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives and He sits and He looks back and He laments and He says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chicks together, but you would not have it. And his disciples hear him talk. They hear Him say. "There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." So, they asked Jesus two questions. First, "tell us when will these things be, the stones being knocked down? And second, what will be the sign of Your coming at the close of the age?"

The answer is really an answer written in the form of history repeats itself. And it begins with an understanding of the abomination that causes desolation. What is the abomination that causes desolation? When something other than God is worshipped. And especially, let the reader understand what that looks like. And the answer to question number one was basically this, when you see the abomination, Rome's standards and the image of Caesar being erected in the temple; run for

your lives because Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. And that is exactly what happened.

But what about; what will be the sign of your coming at the close of the age? And that's where Jesus continues, and He says 'and there will be wars and rumors of wars.' And what does He say about that? 'Oh, don't be alarmed yet,' Not yet, because there's going to be famines, there's going to be earthquakes. But this is just the beginning of birth pains. Now I want you to think about that. Birth pains, birth pains are at the end of the nine months. And so, when you see these things happening, these are the beginning of the birth pains. You're much closer to the end. He continues, there'll be tribulation. They're going to deliver you up. You're going to be hated by all nations for My name's sake. There will definitely be hard times for the followers of Jesus. And when we hear that, you know, Hamas, for example, has a creed to kill all the Jews and then all the Christians. We could see how that would start to happen.

But Jesus, continues. And what He describes is discord within the Church as a result of some of this tribulation. He says, "They will deliver you up, you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake." That doesn't sound good, does it? So, "many will fall away." The Christians are going to fall away because it's just too harmful to be a Christian. They will betray one another. 'Oh, they're the ones that are saying that stuff.' And they will hate one another. Well, those stupid LCMS Lutherans, they always stand on God's word. But why? Why would Christians start to turn on each other and turn away from God?

Well, Jesus tells us, because lawlessness will be increased and understand that lawlessness probably applies both to civil law, as well as God's law. And what happens when we turn our backs on both the civil law and God's law? Hearts will grow cold. And so, I think back to some of the riots that we saw in Portland and Seattle, Chicago, and around the country. People burning, destroying businesses and everything like that. And when you know, mention to them that you're burning down people's businesses, you're destroying their lives, and they say 'who cares? We have the right. We have our rights! And they didn't care. And what's Jesus say about this? "The one who endures to the end will be saved."

And then He throws in, I think maybe the most critical verse and one that the reader needs to understand. “And this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.”

We are called to endure the hardship and at the same time we're called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do we do that? Well, that's where we go to our New Testament reading this morning in the book of Acts. Paul, he enters Athens and we see that he was provoked by the great number of temples and idol worship that was there. So he went to the synagogue and he reasoned with the Jews. And we've seen previously in the book of Acts that when he reasoned with the Jews, he used the scriptures to prove to them that Jesus was the Christ. Well, they must have had the equivalent of some sort of social media back then, because when we see that the Athenians heard of it, the Jews probably told them about it. This Jesus guy, he's saying some really weird stuff. And what is said about those Athenians? They spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. It kind of sounds familiar with the stuff we have nowadays. You come up with anything crazy and say, “hey, this is the latest craze” and people are going to listen to it. They wanted to hear from Jesus. They wanted to hear from Paul about Jesus.

And so, Paul went to the Areopagus, and he addressed them. “Men of Athens. I perceive that in every way you are very religious.” It begins with a compliment. He's finding common ground with them. You, me, we are very religious. You guys are so religious, even have a temple to an unknown God. Funny thing is, I know who that unknown God is. And when we look at what Paul says, boy, I think we can see a creed for ourselves developing. Number one, I know Him. He's the God of creation and He has created all races. That's already back in the First Century. Number two and He created all races so that all should seek Him. Number three, and He's not far away! In fact, He came and walked among you in Jesus Christ. And why should you believe in Jesus Christ? Well, it's really simple, He rose from the dead. There's the validation. And you should probably believe in Him because He's coming back to judge. And what was the response? It was very twenty-first century.

Some mocked him, ridiculed him. We call that cancel culture. Some wanted to hear more. Gosh, these are strange things you said, let's sit down and talk some more and think about these things. Maybe have a cup of coffee. And some believed.

This is our job to endure the tribulation and the craziness, to be the readers who understand. And to preach to all, to sow the seed of the gospel and follow that up with prayer. And then understand that parable that Jesus gave; Some of the seed is going to land on the road and it isn't going to have a chance to grow because the heart is hard, and some will sprout, but it's going to be choked out by the weeds and the culture of the day. Those are the ones that are going to fall away. The discord in the church when things get rough. And some is going to grow and produce, and we are to rejoice in that. Rejoice in their salvation and rejoice that we are enduring and making a difference.

And we are to rejoice in our very own salvation because it is sure. It's true, God has created, God has saved. Because God did send His son, and we know He's the one, because He's the only one who has been raised from the dead. And He calls us to take comfort in that, and to endure in that.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I think as we look around the world, we see a lot of wars and rumors of wars. We see the famines, we see the droughts, we see the floods. We see all that kind of stuff happening at a level that we haven't really seen before. It's definitely ramping up. It's the beginning of the birth pains. Get ready. We're going to see trouble for the church as people are going to try to outlaw Christianity or even make it a capital crime to be a Christian. But endure, and if you want it to come to an end, share that gospel so that it makes it to the very ends of the earth because Jesus Himself said. "And then the end will come." So, I guess the appropriate finish to the sermon is. Let's be ready for the end.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.