

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity
13 August, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 19:41-48

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

People of God,

If you have not read Josephus' account of the destruction of Jerusalem, which our Lord predicts in the reading from St. Luke appointed for today, I would strongly encourage you to do so. The siege and destruction of the city of David by the Roman general Titus was a time of unimaginable horror. Josephus' account brings a whole new perspective to our Lord's words and the source of His weeping. Jesus knew what was coming and He knew why - the temporal and eternal destruction brought on by sin and unbelief. And it is vitally important that we understand it as well so that we do not become dulled to the reality of God's wrath and judgment.

The Jews had turned away from God though He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, though He had mercifully brought them back to Jerusalem and the temple after 70 years in exile for their idolatry, and though He had finally come to them in the flesh to redeem them as He had promised. Time and again, God's people fell into the trap of believing that nothing bad could happen to them because they were Jews, they were God's chosen people. And believing this they believed that they could engage in all manner of wickedness and participate in the worship of pagan deities. They treated the things of God as little more than magic talismans that would ward off the consequences of their sin.

And while their idolatry and false worship were certainly affronts to God's holiness and majesty, worse, they robbed people of salvation. They taught people to turn away from God's Word and instead to the imaginations of their own hearts for salvation. It taught them to not take their sin seriously, to not zealously take up the battle to mortify their flesh, as though God didn't care and would not bring judgment against them. Hear what God said through the prophet Jeremiah from whom Jesus quoted:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. 3 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you

dwell in this place. 4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. '5 "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. 8 "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. 12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.

The Israelites were living like pagans and foolishly imaging that it was okay because they went to the temple and went through all the motions of prayer and sacrifice. They were checking off the boxes. They were using their freedom under God's mercy as a cloak for unrighteousness. But it didn't matter how loudly they said the words, there was no salvation because there was no repentance, no turning away from idolatry or greed or hatred. God visited them time and again through the mouth of His prophets to warn them and to call them to repentance back to the God who had saved them, but they would not listen. They didn't recognize the time of their visitation by God and continued to plunge headlong into their evil. They starved and drove off and killed the faithful prophets. Instead, they listened to those who placated them and indulged their sinful desires. They filled the pockets of those false prophets who lied to them and told them that God was still pleased with them and that they could rest in the peace of their salvation though they transgressed the commandments.

They were wrong. God does indeed hate sin. Failure to repent and turn from sin to faith in Christ Jesus, who suffered on our behalf, means that you have to bear the punishment of your own sin temporally and eternally. The offer of peace is real and God holds it out to us all as we hear the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation. But it is not forced upon you. You can refuse it. You

can reject it either by denying the teaching or by willfully remaining in sin. Jesus lived and preached among the Jews for three years. They knew God's Word. They knew Jesus spoke the truth. Some likely even knew that He was the promised Messiah. It didn't matter. They refused Him. They loved their idolatry. They loved their sin. They loved their self-righteousness. And thus they invited the Lord's strict wrath and judgment against their unbelief. He gave them over to their foolishness. Thus they were eager to listen to those false messiahs who promised salvation from Roman rule and the reestablishment of Israel. God used their foolishness to stir up the Romans against them which spelled the end for Jerusalem. And even more appalling about the whole ordeal in AD 70 was that the pagan Romans repeatedly offered to let the Jews surrender and live. Not even they wanted to see the people or the city destroyed. But these lying messiahs kept falsely claiming that God had promised them victory, driving the city deeper and deeper into famine and chaos as the Romans sat outside the walls. Their idolatry drove them to utter madness. People committed terrible abominations, things that are too horrible to even mention, just to try to live a little longer. But the word of the Lord came to pass and Jerusalem was finally destroyed. In all, Josephus records that 1.1 million people died from starvation and the final Roman siege. God's mercy endures forever, but His patience does not. He is slow to anger but do not confuse His slowness for disinterest.

Is it truly any wonder that Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He approached it for the last time, this time to die for their sins and open the gates of salvation? It was unnecessary. God did not desire their destruction. He took no pleasure in seeing the holy city and the temple torn down. St. Matthew reports these words from Jesus when He lamented the fate of Jerusalem "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

The Jews had turned the worship of God into child's play and imagined that God was fooled by their empty shows of repentance and faith. They were so sorely mistaken. And so are we if we imagine the same thing. God has not cleansed us in Holy Baptism or fed us with the Lord's Supper so that we can delude ourselves into believing that our sin or false teaching is unimportant or that they can't hurt us or that they don't have consequences now and eternally. Man may be fooled by outward piety but God is not. Church or church membership or confirmation or even Baptism are not magical devices that give you license to keep sinning.

If you willingly persist in that which is contrary to the Word of God, if you imagine that being a Christian makes sin suddenly acceptable to God, if you think that Jesus has died for you so that you can keep sinning, repent, before the day of

God's judgment sweeps down on you like it did upon Jerusalem and you perish eternally. It is foolishness and unbelief that behold such things and say that they are just the inevitable trajectory of historical or natural events. And do not be blind to the constant reminders that we have in our own day of the final judgment - the wildfires raging on Maui, the blistering heat under which we are suffering here in Texas, the war in Ukraine. These and so many others are but foretastes of the judgment to come. They are sent to wake us up out of our stupor. They are calls to true repentance that we would take the means of grace seriously, as the most serious things in our lives. They are to be received with the deepest reverence and piety. They are to be received in humility and repentance and faith as the only protection that we have against sin and eternal death. They are not simply habits or ordinances of God, boxes to check to make God happy. They are so deeply profound and necessary for salvation that we ought to seriously prepare ourselves and our children ahead of time to receive them. We don't want them to become just a rabbit's foot worn for good luck. Rather, we want them to constantly be a comfort and aid to us against sin and temptation and a bad conscience. That requires prayer and active hearing of God's Word and a focused heart and mind in the Divine Service.

Read through *Christian Questions with Their Answers* in the hymnal and pray Saturday night or Sunday morning in preparation for hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper in the Divine Service. Pray with all earnestness that God would grant you true repentance and faith that Christ's Body and Blood would strengthen you in faith and love. Read and meditate on the appointed readings for the coming Sunday and discuss them with your family. Pray each and every day for the Lord's help and blessing and forgiveness. Make family devotions the central part of your day every day to read the Bible, to pray, to pass on and teach the faith, and to commit Scripture and the Small Catechism to your memory. These things are not child's play even though they seem simple and powerless. These are real weapons against real enemies for you and for your children. These are real defenses against temptation. These are real strength in the midst of the fiery trial. These are the real and only consolation for a seared and guilty conscience.

By despising any of these things, allowing ourselves to be too busy to take them up, or doing them absent-mindedly or even half-heartedly, we are confessing before God that we don't believe His Word, that we do not fear His wrath, and that we have no real thanks for the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. Prayer, hearing and learning God's Word, receiving the Sacraments, gathering as the body of Christ, teaching the faith, bearing one another's burdens, loving your enemies, sharing the Gospel - these are all acts of faith. Apart from faith they are sin because

they become substitutes for Christ's atoning sacrifice. When we treat them as a list of items that need to be done to make God happy, when we treat them as though they don't deserve the deepest of our respect and devotion, we join ourselves to the judgment of Jerusalem. We despise the visitation of Christ who has come to bestow upon us His own righteousness, we turn God's house of prayer and mercy into a den of robbers.

The Jews were indeed very pious and strove mightily after good works imagining that their works could save them. But their works only condemned them, regardless of how good they appeared or how vigorously they insisted that they were the people of God, because they imagined that their good works made them righteous and pleasing to God. It is no different today. Anyone who trusts in what they have done, anyone who trusts in his faith, anyone who makes excuses for his sins, anyone who minimizes the means of God's grace, anyone who tries to rest on the fact that they have always been members of the church, will suffer the wrath of God. He will be abandoned to the full consequences of his unbelief. Death and the devil will surround him on every side and tear him down to the ground. He will have no comfort, no peace, no rest, no hope because his trust was in himself and not in Christ Jesus.

Children of God, behold the great sorrow of Christ who longed that the Jews would turn from their unbelief and idolatry and return to Him, their Savior, who loved them and had come to redeem them from death. His love and concern for you is no less. His fervent desire is that you enjoy every blessing and benefit of His kingdom now and for all eternity. He didn't take an ounce of pleasure in Jerusalem's destruction. He takes no pleasure in ours. God grant that we do not trade the life of His Word for any version of works righteousness. God grant that we do not despise His Word, His promises, or the Holy Sacraments. God grant that we treasure all of these things above all else in this world because it is through these and these alone that we are saved.

Let us not fail to recognize that this is the day of the Lord's visitation. This day the Lord stands in the midst of us poor sinners to save us, to take away the guilt of our sins, to teach us truth, to draw us into life with God, to bestow upon us the peace of His cross. For His cross is the judgment of all who cling to Him in faith. On Good Friday, God poured out all of His wrath against your sin upon His sinless Son. Jesus was condemned with your condemnation. You have been justified by His Blood. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) This is the day of salvation. This holy food, the true Body and Blood of our Savior, was given and shed FOR YOU that you might be saved, that

you might be forgiven. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath so that you might drink deeply of the cup of God's salvation. This day the Lord Jesus visits you with His grace and mercy and forgiveness. Receive Him this day in true faith. For all who do will receive Him with joy on the Last Day when He returns on the clouds to gather His Church into His perfect and eternal presence.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.