

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity
12 November, Anno Domini 2023
St. Matthew 24:15-28

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

People of God,

It seems as though our Lord Jesus Christ has been delayed. After accomplishing our salvation through His brutal death under the guilt of the world's sin and His triumphant resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ was taken out of our sight and was enthroned at the right hand of the divine majesty. But He promised that He would return. He promised that He would not leave us as orphans in this horrible and corrupt world. Like Moses, Jesus ascended but has not yet returned. Where is the promise of His return?

And we have grown restless to be sure. Why doesn't He come back now? Is He going to come back at all? Has our hope been in vain? Have Christ's people believed and suffered for nothing? Many have given up. Many have been poisoned by the world's promise of happiness and pleasure and denied Christ to chase after them. Many have gone and fashioned their golden calves in the images of the desires of their flesh and pour out their energy, their time, and their money to serve them and please them. They have forgotten the one who redeemed them with His Blood and rescued them from slavery to eternal death. They have given His glory to another. They lust after pleasure, they seek to throw off every chain of the divine Law, and they have an insatiable gluttony for the world's pleasures. I'm sure you yourself know some who have even literally turned to things like satanism or witchcraft, or who have been polluted and confused with the perverse sexual idolatries of our age. Who here has not been forced to watch in horror and bitter grief as a loved one or a friend gleefully condemned the Christian faith they once joyfully confessed?

How many churches have simply given up the fight and, in a desperate desire to be loved by the world, gladly confessed the devil's doctrine because it's easier and they can get more people in the door and putting money in the plate? How many supposedly Christian churches have abandoned the clear Word of God for the poison-laced candy of the world's approval? Sparkle creeds. Openly unrepentant sinners receiving Holy Baptism and serving as baptismal sponsors and witnesses. Promoting and celebrating abortion as a moral good that is pleasing to God. And

worst of all, denying Christ Jesus as the sole source and giver of salvation, denying the precious sacraments as the means by which Christ saves and preserves us for eternal life.

Have we ourselves grown tired of the delay and stopped expecting Christ? Have we allowed our hearts to chase after other gods hoping they will help us, deliver us, or just give us what we want - gods like alcohol, health, money, fun, politicians, popularity? Who here has not been so tempted in the face of such degradation and seeming hopelessness? Who has not been lured by the promise of an easier life, a life of indulgence, a life of utter self-gratification as though that is freedom rather than one of self-denial and self-sacrifice? Wouldn't it be easier to just go along with the world rather than fight it? You wouldn't have to look like a prudish weirdo to your friends. You could sleep in on Sunday mornings and not give up a part of your precious income? You wouldn't have to pray or read the Bible or feel guilty for not following it. Moses' brother Aaron certainly thought so. After all, can so many people be wrong? The pressure is immense and growing by the hour. It comes at us from every side and even from within. Our flesh certainly doesn't want to suffer the world's wrath or be told it can't have what it wants.

The devil is furiously at work as the hour draws ever nearer when he along with the demons and all who have given themselves to his lies and rebellion are cast forever into the lake of fire, when the trumpet sounds and the cry of the archangel announces the return of the Lord Jesus Christ for judgment. Satan has only one goal - to destroy the works of God, to lead astray even the elect if he is able. That means you who believe and are baptized into Christ. He will stop at nothing. He knows no rules. Everyone is expendable. Mercy is not in his vocabulary.

He sends his false christs and false prophets to the four corners of the earth to deceive you, to replace the robes of Christ's righteousness with the garish rags of unbelief and idolatry. They proclaim a Christ who doesn't exist. They draw your eyes away from the Word and Sacraments as sources of life and urge you to look in places where Christ has not promised that He would be. They can say and do anything so long as they do not permit people's faith to rest in Jesus. They can use the Lord's Name. They can call themselves Christians but they don't have to. They can read from the Bible...or the Koran...or the Book of Mormon...or simply the dictates of their own hearts. They can preach a law of works unto salvation or praise abject hedonism. But under no circumstance are they permitted to preach the divine Law. Under no circumstance are they permitted to call the works of the world evil. Under no circumstance are they to point to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

They boldly proclaim that they have the way to eternal life and bliss. They will help you find your christ in austere wilderness of Stoic self-control and good works or in the inner desires of your heart. They proclaim that there is no such thing as eternal life or death and that the highest good you will ever obtain is pleasure in this life, however you so define it.

They set up all manner of abominable desolations in the holy place of Christ's Church, replacing faith in Christ with abject pagan demon worship. We must not indulge them. We must not listen to them. We must flee from them to the Word of Christ, our refuge and strength in whom we will find shelter as the day of the Lord draws near. We must not allow ourselves to grow weary of the Lord's absence and so give up our vigilance.

He is returning for judgment and to gather His saints together. It will not be secret. There will be no rapture of believers. All will know the moment of Christ's return. Like the instantaneous light of a thunderbolt from east to west, so will be the appearance of Christ. On that day all will confess Him, some unto eternal life other to their eternal damnation because they did not believe in Him. To those who did believe, those who loved not their lives in this world and stayed awake looking for His coming, in a twinkling of an eye we will be changed. Our flesh will be cleansed completely of the sinful nature and we will be pure as Christ is pure. We will look upon Him face to face in joy for all eternity. There will be no more hope or faith. Only eternal rejoicing and peace. Our hope in Christ and confession of His saving Name will be vindicated in the sight of the world.

Children of God, do not grow weary of Christ's patience and allow yourself to be drawn away by the false christs and prophets that now fill the world. Do not abandon the one who rescued you from the devil's kingdom and made you His child and heir. Wait with patience. Put to death the desires of your flesh which wants only to fill its belly and indulge its desires. Wait in prayer. Discipline your flesh. Fill yourself with the bread of God's Word and His holy Flesh which preserve you unto life everlasting.

In the Name of +Jesus.
Pastor Ulmer

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