

Sermon for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C  
18.xi.2007, 10:00 Holy Communion • ELW Service of the Word  
Malachi 4:1-2a; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19  
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

# J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

**“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”**

**--Luke 21:19**

What will the future bring? Will I hear good news or bad news from my doctor? Will things get better where I work, or will I even have a job in the New Year? What will happen to me and to those dear to me? Will I have the strength to endure that?

Interest in the end of all things, whether that would be a blessed time of release from suffering and oppression or a terrible time of tribulation and judgment was high when Our LORD walk the earth with His first Disciples.

We can see this from their question to Him in today's Gospel. Among those who believed in the coming of Messiah and the just and righteous reign of God, while living under the rule of a brutally oppressive Roman Empire, who would not want to know when the LORD planned to take charge?

Who indeed? Interest in the end-time *then* could not have been any greater than *today*. Those of us who watch the indicators of environmental degradation, the decline in agriculture for food production and the rise in the population of starving millions, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the prevalence of local genocide on both a small and large-scale may wonder whether it is too late to change the course on which we have set the human race and the whole earth, whether a very bad end-time has not already begun to unfold. Where

awareness of present evil and folly or environmental challenges become not a call to action but a kind of fatalism about the future, action becomes frozen in panic. Perhaps that is why the U. S. Congress is failing once again to pass the Farm Bill.

Then there are those who—despite and in direct contradiction to Our LORD’s prohibition against predicting the end-time based on present catastrophes—use their Bibles to divine the future have never been greater in number as the radio waves continue to crackle with their ‘holy whine,’ augmented by television and the Internet. Occultists of various stripes look to Nostradamus or Kabala or Edgar Cayce, to spiritualists or to the ‘Oui-Ja’ Board to foretell the future.

But, Disciples of Jesus Christ are supposed to be different in this very respect. Those who believe in the

Kingdom of God and whom actually live by faith active in love within that Kingdom are not to be disturbed, not by the religious false prophets, even by those claiming to prophecy in Jesus' name, not by the occultist crack-pots and not by the scientific prognosticators. It is not that we are to be indifferent to the world around us—quite the contrary! But, our hope is not grounded in that world. Our hope is built on the One in Whom the world and its history and purpose has already been fulfilled and brought to its proper end.

We are to live from that end-time that has already occurred in Jesus the Christ, in Whom heaven and earth, God and humanity have been reconciled. There is a powerful prayer from the early Church that expresses this. That is the so-called 'Prayer of Hyppolitus' which you have heard me use often in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Saint Hyppolitus was Catholic Patriarch of Rome, and martyr for the Christian faith, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. His prayer begins:

**“We give You thanks, Father, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, whom You sent *in this end of the ages* to save and redeem us and to proclaim to us Your will . . . .”**

I had opportunity not long ago to discuss this prayer, and whether to use it, with a fellow Lutheran pastor who told me flat out concerning the phrase, ‘In this end of all the ages . . .’: “Well, *that’s* not true. Paul thought it was true, and so did John, and so did Jesus for that matter, but we know now that they were mistaken.” No, we do *not* know that, for it *is* true. If this finite universe lasts another billion trillion years, and if our human race evolves into

whatever our unbounded technology can devise, into wonderful beings or pathetic experimental failures that are more machine than human perhaps, no point of perfection will be reached that can ever approach the instant of perfection when a young woman of pure faith and heart said yes to the Creator of her universe and the Author of her humanity and when God became the fulfillment of the image of God in that single human life that took form in her immaculate womb. The 'end of all the ages' began at that moment of fulfillment with the conception of Immanuel, not with Robert Oppenheimer's nuclear explosion in the New Mexico desert, not with Stalin or Hitler or any great tyrant or evil genius, not with any of our capacity to destroy and end things, but with the beginning God the Almighty made then and there, in an ordinary house in the town of

Nazareth on a day like any other, *and we live in that end-time*, in that ‘end of all the ages.’

Living in the end-time, living out of God’s new genesis, out of God’s new creation of the whole world in Jesus Christ, we are free from all anxiety about the end, about the end of all things, about the end of those people and communities we love but which, like we ourselves, are passing away out of history into God’s future. We are thus free to care for the earth and all who live in it and from it. Shielded from fear about the end, since we live out of that end in Christ, we are thus free to endure all things in Him, for He has overcome all things, *all* things that threaten us!

*Let us pray:* LORD God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out

with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that  
your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins  
by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His  
God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the  
Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✠ Amen.

**S. D. G.!**