



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

November 1, 2009

1st Sunday of Endtime

Mark 13:5-11

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 3:16-28

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46

Second Lesson: Revelation 14:6,7

Gospel: Mark 15:5-11

Learn From the Signs

Have you ever been driving on the highway and there is a lane that is going to be closed up ahead and there are signs that seem to keep coming and coming and coming until you finally get to where the lane is closed? When there isn't much traffic and you can just fly along, do you ever think to yourself, "Why do they have those signs up so far ahead of time?"

I had the opposite experience this last Thursday when I drove across the bridge in DePere. The left-hand lane was almost all the way back across three-quarters of the bridge. I looked around and didn't see any sign that says "Lane Closed Ahead." So I thought "I don't know why they are all in that lane, but I'm not going there." So I jump in the right lane and go flying by them all. I get up on the other side of the bridge and as I get across that little hump in the bridge, I still didn't see a sign, but I could see there were some people working on the road up ahead and the lane was closed. There was no sign. So I was the guy that they were all muttering under their breath about thinking "why aren't you getting back in line? Why are you trying to drive ahead and cut in front of everyone?" I'm sure people waved at me with one of their fingers and I didn't notice it. But I was that guy that everyone gets upset about. I didn't know. There were no signs. I didn't see a sign. I looked for it. I took the time to actually look for it, didn't see one, so I thought "I don't know. Maybe they're all car pooling or going in the same direction." It's kind of nice when those signs are there ahead of time so you don't feel like a fool, right?

When you look at the words I just read to you from Mark, it's a long list of signs that Jesus is talking about, about the end of the world, right? When you see these things happening, know that these are the signs that the end is coming. Then when he says to look closely at these signs, he says you are going to learn a couple of things from looking closely at these signs that he is talking about.

The first thing you are going to learn is that bad things are going to happen. You are going to be flogged in the synagogue. You are going to be handed over before rulers and authorities. There are going to be famines. There are going to be wars. There are going to be deceivers that come from inside the church. Bad things are going to happen. And then secondly what you need to learn when you see these signs is to be on your guard. Don't let these bad things trip you up in your walk with Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Don't let these bad things convince you that God doesn't love you or

that God isn't with you or that he didn't die to take away your sins. Be on your guard because that is what Satan is going to be busy trying to do.

As we come together on this day and look at these words, I wonder if the guy (that you probably don't think about that much, and he's never wore a green or a purple jersey) that's had the most impact on your life, other than maybe God himself, is a guy who wore a black teaching gown. He also wore a white alb as he led worship in the castle church in Wittenberg. I wonder if Luther thought about these signs as he was going through the Reformation. "You are going to be handed over before kings and emperors." That's certainly what Luther went through. After he had been convicted, he found by the Word of God that Scripture alone was the authority and we are saved by God's grace (or his undeserved love) alone, not by our works, and that faith alone saves, not our works. He began to write about that and he published that. And he said, "You know what? Popes have made mistakes. Councils have made mistakes because they are just men. But God's Word never makes a mistake." That was leading to a big split within Charles V's empire. Charles V didn't want religious troubles going on, so he called Luther to forums. They put his books in front of him and said, "Are these your books?" They read a list of all the titles they had there. Luther said, "Yes, these are my books." "Do you recant? Do you take back the things you have written? If not, we are going to put you under the emperor's edict," which means it's now "open season" on Martin Luther. If anyone finds him, you can kill him. Luther asked for a day to think about it.

He came back the next day and said, "Unless I am shown from God's Word where what I said is wrong, I am not going to take it back. It is neither good nor right for a man to go against conscience. If you can't show me from God's Word where I am wrong, I will not and I cannot recant. Here I stand. I can do no other." That's exactly what we read in Mark. "You are going to be brought before kings and those in authority." What are you going to do? Are you going to deny God because bad things are happening? I can't imagine what he must have gone through.

I don't know if you've ever watched the Luther video, the DVD that was just put out a couple of years ago, but it's fascinating to me. There is also the older black and white version of Martin Luther. Both are fascinating. I cannot imagine what it would be like to be brought before someone and ways said, "Do you take back what you've written and what you say you believe? Or do you say you believe it, and if you say that, I don't want a debate theology," Charles V said. "If you say 'that's what I believe,' then you will be under the emperor's ban. Anyone that finds you can put you to death and there will be no charges of crime." Under the threat of death; bad things will happen – would you be willing to stand and say the same thing you said on your Confirmation day? "I'd rather die than fall away from Jesus." We've already all said it, but we haven't had the sword hanging over our heads, have we?

How could Luther do such a thing? How could he do it as he faced these bad things that were happening to him? I'm convinced that Luther would tell you the reason he was able to do it is because he was on his guard. "Be on your guard." And his guard

was found in the Holy Spirit. God said to the apostles, “Don’t worry about what to say ahead of time. The Holy Spirit will give it to you.” He gave them direct revelation through the Holy Spirit so they could speak before kings and governors and emperors. And they did. But for you and me and for Luther, God sends the Spirit to us through Word and Sacrament. And I think Luther stood on that Word and Sacrament when he was threatened.

Have you ever noticed Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayer? Most of us that grew up in the Lutheran church have said that, read that, or memorized it one time or another, right? Have you ever wondered why it starts out “In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” It’s because when Luther would say that, he would make the sign of the cross over himself to remember the sign of the cross that was made over him at his baptism. The start of that prayer is to take him back to his baptism. Luther, when he was assaulted by the temptations of the devil, the devil I’m sure would often say to him, “Who are you? You are some lowly monk in the middle of Germany, in some Podunk town in Germany, and you are the one that is going to stand up and say everyone else is wrong and you’re right?” When assaulted with those accusations, Luther would say, “I am a baptized child of God. I have the Word of God. That’s why I can say these things.”

Luther wrote an incredible amount of things. Down in the basement are some of the sermons he wrote. There is a volume of about eight sets of sermons he wrote for every Sunday of the church year on all the different lessons. It’s fascinating reading. But he wrote all these things and did all these things I suppose because that’s what he devoted his life to – the study of the Word of God and the sharing of the Word of God. When you think about it, he didn’t have a lot of distractions. He didn’t have television. He didn’t have the phone ringing. He didn’t have computers to consume his time. He could have the Word of God consume his time. But if you watch the videos about his life, you can see that bad things happen. Nations rise against nations. Kingdoms rise against kingdoms. The wars of Luther’s day had a savagery that you and I don’t know, and Luther was at the epicenter of some of them. So when we see a guy like him go back to the Word of God and find in the Word of God his strength, I think we can see that he was applying what God said to the Law and to the testimony. Not to other things, but to the Law and to the testimony.

And for you and me, as we look around the world today, as we walk through our life, do we see bad things happening? Do we see nations rising against nations, wars, rumors of wars? Do we see people coming from inside the church and deceiving many?

This Easter, when you are in the checkout isle at the store – don’t buy it, I don’t want you to spend your money on it – when you see Jesus on the cover of Time or Newsweek or US News and World Report, pick that up and page through the article and read what these doctors of theology say about Jesus and his resurrection. Every year I do this and I read that Jesus didn’t literally rise from the dead. He just rose spiritually and lives on in our hearts. This is what people from inside the church are teaching and saying, that Jesus didn’t physically rise from the dead. What did the Holy Spirit have

Paul write? “If Christ is not risen, than you are still in your sins, and your faith is useless.” But it’s coming from inside the church and it’s attacking and deceiving many.

I tell the kids this in Confirmation Class all the time. You need to know what the Bible says. You don’t need to know what Pastor Ott said in Confirmation Class. Pastor Ott can go nuts and be nuts already. You don’t know that. I could be teaching false doctrine. But if you’re in the Word and you are looking at what I say compared to the Word, then you can know and test the spirits to see whether I am nuts or have gone nuts or if I am teaching false doctrine. So if you’re in the Word, you can hold my feet to the fire of God’s Word if I’m wrong. I’m a man. I can be wrong. I can say things mistakenly, or I could be corrected from God’s Word. But do it on the basis of God’s Word, not on what other churches are doing or what other people do. Do it on the basis of God’s inspired, inerrant Word, and then I have to just shut my mouth and listen to you. There’s no “yeah, but” to God’s Word if we are all agreed that God’s Word is the authority.

Many will come from inside the church and deceive many. It happened already in the day of Paul and the apostles. It happened in Luther’s day. It happens in our day. Bad things will happen. Be on your guard. That’s what God says to us.

Don’t let the bad things that happen in your personal life or in the world around you, don’t let that lead Satan to get you to believe that God is no longer in control or God no longer loves you. Bad things are going to happen because Adam and Eve sinned. There’s sin in this world. Bad things will happen. And as it gets closer and closer to the end, it’s going to be like a watch that needs to be rewound. It’s going to keep worse and worse time. Things are going to get worse and worse. Just know that. Don’t be terrified by it to the point that you think God isn’t in control. Be aware of it. If it scares you a little bit, let it scare you, but let that fear drive you to the Word of God, to the Law and the testimony, to the prophets and the apostles. That’s what Jesus said the foundation on which he was going to build his church was on, Christ and the confession of the apostles and the prophets, because they focused on Jesus.

The more you and I can say, “This is what God says,” the more you and I will stand on a sure foundation on a solid ground, and we won’t be knocked off that solid ground. The Lord will eventually take us out of this world and all its troubles to the perfection that is ours in heaven, not because we hung on tight, but because Jesus lived and died to take away every last one of our sins, every last one of the times we have doubted God’s love and presence, every last time we have tried to find our strength in something outside of his Word; every one of those sins have been washed away through the life and death of Christ.

It doesn’t get any better than that.