**Mark 13:1-13 November 18, 2018**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 13 here re-reading these words. “And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The day is surely drawing near. We are coming to the end. One of the worst feelings in the world is to think that you have arrived at the end of something, and realize you’re only at the beginning. Perhaps you can remember being out with your mom running errands. Every time you ask if we are almost done, if it’s almost time to go home you may have been given the answer, “We’ll be done soon.” And so, thinking this was the end of the errands you realized after each stop that you weren’t even close. Like going out working with Dad and there’s always just “one more thing” that needs to be done, until you realize it’s been hours and it doesn’t seem like he is getting ready to quit. It’s the strategy of every workout video. You count you down from 10, they encourage you that there’s only a few more to go, you make it to the end, and then it’s right back to another set of 10, or worse yet, 20. This isn’t the end, it’s only the beginning. And it can be hard to endure that truth, and to continue on the path that is set before you knowing that there is still so much farther to go. Knowing that there is still so much more that will happen and that must be done.

In a way that’s what’s going on in the Church Year here at St. John. As we come together today there is only 1 Sunday left in the entire Church Year. And that isn’t the only countdown we’ve been facing lately. After this Sunday there is only one Sunday left, where I will be your pastor. As the Church Year ends, the focus shifts away from the parables of Jesus and his miracles to the end times and teaching us about Judgment Day. Gone is Reformation Day, All Saints’ Day, and even Widow’s Sunday. Instead the end times shows up in all three of our Scripture lessons this morning. In Daniel we hear that “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” In Hebrews we are encouraged “to stir one another to love and good works, to encourage one another as we meet together and see the Day drawing near.” Even our Introit begins “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” And here in our Gospel lesson Jesus lists off a number of things that will signify that the end times are coming, from wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and even the temple being destroyed just to name a few. And at the end of the list he tells his disciples. “These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

The day is surely drawing near. The wars, the strife, the fighting between nations and the destruction of earthquakes are only the beginning. Now that is news that is worse than one more errand, a few more posts that need to be pounded into the ground or another set of pushups or sit ups. It’s news that shakes us to the core, especially in our lives today, where it seems every week we hear about another tragedy whether here in the United States or somewhere else in the world. A journalist is killed in Saudi Arabia, sparking conflict and perhaps war to come between nations. A fire that burns out of control, killing and destroying lives, buildings, and even churches. And while our hearts go out to those affected by such horrible tragedies, as we join together to pray for those families who have lost loved ones and to come to God asking for peace and stability, sadly these stories has become all too common. Every year we hear about the destruction of hurricanes, fires, terrible snow storms and that’s just what we focus on here in the United States. The world is full of tragedies and destruction. We’ve faced these tragedies before. We’ve faced wars before, and not just here in the United States, but all around the world since the time that Christ spoke these words to the disciples there have been wars and rumors of wars. There have been earthquakes. There have been famines. We are living in the times that Jesus described. We are living in that “time of trouble” that Daniel was talking about.

The battle rages in our own lives as it does all around the world as we are faced with the reality that the road is long, and this is not the end of our strife, but only the beginning. It’s something that is reflected in your Baptism as you are asked “Do you renounce the Devil and all his works and all his ways?” That statement in itself is a declaration that you will live a life that is in constant strife with the enemy of God and His Church. It’s the start of your life as a Christian soldier in the Church militant. And it never stopped, not when you were Confirmed and spoke the same words that you said or were said for you at your Baptism, and not even now, as you sit and come together to be strengthened by God’s Word, Sacraments, and each other. For the battle is not over, it continues to rage. And we all must encourage, stir each other up in love and good works, meet together and be strengthened by the gifts of God, so that we endure to the end and receive the promised gift of eternal life.

In a way that’s what these last Sundays of the Church Year are all about. A reminder that what we experience here is nothing compared to the riches that wait for us in heaven. That as the days grow shorter and God’s creation dies and begins to adapt to another winter, this year it seems winter has decided to come even before the end of the church year, we are reminded that we too do not live in an eternal creation. We live in a world that is perishing all around us. We live in the days that Jesus describes where Christians are being handed over to the governing authorities. Where families are turning on each other because of what the Bible teaches and what the doctrines of the Church say. And sadly too often when we are faced with this reality we do not endure, but instead we despair or even run away from bearing Christ’s name.

We despair of ourselves and our faith. We despair and see the road as being too long and too treacherous before us. Instead of continuing and marching forward as Christian Soldiers off to war with the cross before us as our battle standard, we turn tail and run. We run from confronting those who live in open rebellion and sin. We run from the Law of God which exposes us for the sinners we are. We run from our guilt and our shame and hope that it stays far from our consciences and our minds as we just try to make it a few more miles down the road of life. On our own, the command of Christ at the end of our Gospel lesson is impossible. To be hated by all, even your family, your friends, and the world around you and to hope to endure by your own strength is impossible. On your own you cannot endure any better than anyone else. You will fall away. You will not stand.

The day is surely drawing near and Jesus says “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” It was said in our Introit this morning. It was repeated twice and is a major focus of our lives as Christians. For all those who remain faithful, even unto death will be given the crown of life. And while this may seem to be our own work and effort, the remarkable truth of the Gospel is that this task cannot be completed on our own. That this work of enduring isn’t something that we can accomplish by our own strength, but it is the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and the work of Jesus Christ. The strength that we need to fight the good fight against Satan, this world of persecution and hatred, and even our own sinful nature can’t possibly come from ourselves and our own will because we are defiled, corrupted and imperfect instruments used by God to do His Will. The strength must come from God, and this is where we receive it. Here in God’s House, in His Divine Service to us. In this moment, where we gather together, not neglecting to, as was even becoming the habit of some at the very beginning of the Church so long ago. For this is where we receive the strength that we need to endure to the end, and receive the gift of everlasting life.

This is where we receive what was won for us so long ago, when the temple was destroyed, but not the physical temple of marble, and stone but the temple of Christ’s body. The temple was the connection between the people and God, and in the same way, Christ is our connection to God our Father and His holiness. But to make us holy God’s only Son came in order to die in our place. Christ took upon himself our failures, our sin, and our rebellion, and instead of turning tail and running away from the cross, and running away from the pain, he willingly gave himself up as the final and complete sacrifice for sin. As it says in Hebrews. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” You are being sanctified today, here in God’s house. You are being made holy by God.

Here in God’s house you are strengthened, in the remembrance of your Baptism, in the recognition of the amazing and life changing moment when you were washed and adopted into God’s Holy family as a son and daughter of God and we were sealed together in a fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ. Here you are strengthened by Christ’s body and blood truly present in bread and wine that you eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins. Here you are strengthened by hearing the inspired Word of God speaking to you and strengthening your faith. And here we all are strengthened even by each other, as we share words of encouragement, as we sing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs together. As we pray for each other and for the needs of the world as a great assembly of believers. Where we have fellowship with one another and learn more about each other. As we gather to study God’s Word in a deeper way in Bible Study, as we study the words of the hymns that we sing together and gain a greater appreciation for what is being taught to us in this music, and even have the amazing opportunity to teach the children of the Church in Sunday school.

The day is surely drawing near. And this Church is where we receive the strength to endure, where Christ equips us with the tools and with the armor of God to go back out through those doors into the daily fight that it is to live as a Christian in a hostile and fallen creation. And just as Jesus reminded the disciples that their fellowship with the Father comes through Him, our fellowship with God comes through the same Jesus Christ who is present with us in Word and Sacrament. For the temple of the time of the disciples did not stand forever, and sadly these walls may someday crumble. This Church building may cease to exist. But the Church will live on, for we are members together of the Holy Christian Church of all believers of all time that waits till that glorious day when Christ returns and takes us to be with him. I pray that the truth of God’s love for you gives you strength as you go forward in this world bearing the name of Jesus Christ, eagerly awaiting the Final Day.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.