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## The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost November 13, 2022

### We Live with the Judgment in View

The day of God's final judgment doesn't create fear in Christians. On that day the Lord Jesus will come again and carry us to our eternal home in heaven. The days before the final judgment are not worry-free, however. Satan could not defeat Jesus, but he works instead to derail Jesus' followers by sending troubles and tragedies to our world. Worship this week gives us guidance to deal with the days from now until Judgment Day. Jesus says in the Gospel: "Stand firm, and you will win life."

### Sermon Luke 21:5-19

Introduction – The Bible tells us clearly and consistently that Judgment Day is coming. The Old Testament prophets predicted Judgment Day, Jesus talked about Judgment Day, and the writers of the New Testament wrote about Judgment Day. On the day of judgment all the bodies that have died will be reunited with their souls either in heaven or hell. At that point everyone, those who had died and those who are still alive, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. On Judgment Day the judge of all people will announce formally and publicly the wonderful future of the saved and the dreadful fate of the damned. God leaves no doubt about the reality of Judgment Day.

The timing of Judgment Day is a different story. God doesn't tell us when Judgment Day will come. When Jesus lived on earth, he gave up his right to know everything God was planning, so he didn't know. And he made it clear that no one knows. It would be like in the days of Noah, he said; no one expected it to start raining. Peter wrote it would come like a thief in the night. St. Paul described the *what* of Judgment Day but didn't mention the *when*.

The timing of Judgment Day has always caused problems in the Church. Sometimes believers start to speculate and predict. Church members in Thessalonica quit their jobs and sat around waiting. There have been hundreds of predictions over the centuries and none of them turned out to be true. Some early Christians became impatient and wondered if Judgment Day would ever come. In our society more people make jokes about Judgment Day than take it seriously.

So where are we on this? We live our lives and do our work day after day and year after year. We are all convinced by faith that Judgment Day is coming and that Jesus will return. So what do we do? How do we live? What's our plan? In today's Gospel Jesus has something to say about Judgment Day and it's going to help us answer this question:

### What is Our Task from Now until Then?

Take note of the scourge of Satan  
Take up the sword of the Spirit

1. It was Tuesday of Holy Week and Jesus had been teaching in the temple courts all day long. The tension between Jesus and his Jewish enemies was so thick you could cut it with a knife. The disciples might have been looking for a little relief when they started talking about how beautiful the temple was. Jesus turned the conversation serious real fast: **The time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.** Well, that changed the mood. The disciples asked, **When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?**

Jesus put on his godly glasses and looked ahead. The first sight he saw was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, forty years down the road. The Roman general Titus did exactly what Jesus said he would do. He burned the temple down. But Jesus saw more than Jerusalem. He saw Judgment Day, too. And he predicted what believers could expect from that day in 29 AD until the last day, Judgment Day.

Prediction number one: **Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.'** Jesus' followers could expect that false teachers and heretics would pop up again and again. They would insist they had all the right answers but they never did. Prediction two: **Wars and uprisings, Jesus said. These things must happen first. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** The believers could expect social unrest, rebellion, and wars. Prediction three: **There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.** Think of natural disasters, pandemics, financial depressions, explosions in the solar system. Prediction four: **They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me.** Believers could expect persecution: physical persecution, social persecution, and even persecution from family members. In some cases, even death and martyrdom.

Is Judgment Day closer now than it ever has been before? Seems so, doesn't it. We certainly notice these signs of the end. Every single one of Jesus' predictions is coming true in our world right now, if not to us, then to Christians somewhere. The facts are all in; we can document the fulfillment of these predictions. But here's the problem: Every single one of these predictions has been coming true for 2,000 years! Every era of Christian history has been filled with heretics and horrors and pandemics and persecution. You name it: it's in the history books. The truth is that these "signs of the end" don't help us predict the timing of Judgment Day. Judgment Day has always been near. Even with these predictions, we're no closer to dating Judgment Day than we ever were.

So what is our task from now until then? We need to come to grips with the reality, we need to face the fact that Satan knows Judgment Day is coming, too. What Jesus could see in the future and what we can see as we look to the past all come from the devil's determined effort to keep people away from God. You and I have been so blessed in the United States. We've been spared most of the horrors that other Christians have endured. The Word and the sacraments have prepared us to watch and wait in faith and patience. We all look forward to the Savior's return and we do it with confidence and joy. But as we watch and wait, we need to take note of the evil which Satan sends to our world day after day and hour after hour. All around us heretics are still damaging faith, wars are demolishing homes, pandemics are devastating families, and persecutions are destroying health or reputations. What we hear on the news and see in society is more than just a rehash of the days of our lives. What we hear and see is the scourge of Satan on earth working to drive a wedge between Jesus and people before Judgment Day comes.

2. So what is our task from now until then? Jesus says it clearly: **In all this you will bear testimony to me.** Jesus could see his followers standing up for his truth. When the Jews demanded the apostles stop preaching, Peter said, **We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.** When the emperor demanded that he stop teaching, Martin Luther said, "Here I stand, I can do no other." This is our task now. St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, **Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.** And the armor of God includes **the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.** You and I are not Peter or Paul or even Luther, but in our own way and at our time we need to **speak the truth in love, to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have.** We need to speak about Jesus who lived and died to free us from sin; about Jesus who came out of the tomb to give us life with God; about Jesus who loves us and leads us each day of our lives. I know what you're thinking: I can't do this; I don't know what to say; I don't want to say the wrong thing and make matters worse. But listen to Jesus: **Make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.** And then Jesus promises: **But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.**

**The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** The devil's day will come. On Judgment Day the devil will come crashing down with all his demons and all his disciples. Paul wrote in the Second Reading for today: **God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. On**

Judgment Day Jesus will end the suffering and heartaches and confusion believers all over the world have endured. So from now until then this is our task: to see the woes in this world for what they really are—the scourge of Satan to destroy the people of God: People you know and don't know, people near you and far from you, people seeking your help and not seeking help. For the sake of all of them and for our sake, too, we take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and we take our stand against the devil's schemes as we look forward to the coming of Christ. That's our task from now until then. Amen.