**Redemption Day**

Based on [Luke 23:27-43](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk23.27-43)

Preached on November 13, 2016

Pentecost 26, Proper 28

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

There will be a day--no one knows when--that the world as we know it will come to an end. Jesus says a lot in today’s Gospel about this, and I will summarize the teaching into three points. **First, eventually God will withdraw his gracious hand from the world and it will begin to unravel and fall apart.** Second, God’s doing so will reveal all manner of evil in the world and expose everyone’s deeds for open judgment. Third, those who persevere in His word and do not give up will be preserved through this great tribulation and will see their redemption.

(1) First, eventually God will withdraw his gracious hand from the world and it will begin to unravel. **The world was destined for destruction the moment sin entered into it; and the only reason that it was not destroyed immediately is because God, in his loving-kindness, His mercy, His patience, continued to bear with the world and hold it together.** And Satan was bound, meaning he was not given free reign in the world. He is the prince of this world, but God is still restraining him. **If God would for even a moment withdraw His hand--call back all his heavenly hosts of angels sent to protect you from the spiritual forces of darkness--you wouldn’t last another heartbeat, and the misery and horror you would experience instantly and eternally is unspeakable.** But God continues to be gracious to his fallen creation--to you and even to unbelievers--so that through His perfect patience, all might come to knowledge of the truth and be saved.

**God causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Crops grow for both faithful and unfaithful people.**  But if our gracious and heavenly Father, if He pulled the plug even for a second, the sun would scorch the whole earth, earthquakes would send the mountains into the sea. Eruptions would flow from the heart of the earth and melt away cities. Crops wouldn’t grow; famine and pestilence would spread. **The cancer and disease that has a claim on your sinful body from the death it earned in the Garden would grow, well…like cancer.** It wouldn’t be one out of every five people get it; everyone’s body is diseased from sin. But God, because He is gracious and loving and desires salvation for all--He maintains order in His creation, and He spares us from this fate.

God still lets the effects of sin be seen to an extent. Some do get cancer, suffer famine, etc. This is so that we know sin is still a problem, and know our need for repentance and for receiving our righteousness from God by faith. **But the amount of chaos and evil he restrains for all of humanity sheerly out of his divine mercy and grace--(even for those who hate him and curse his name)--is beyond measure.** Eventually though, God will have to come again in His full glory, destroy all evildoers, and redeem for His people a new heavens and a new earth. And before this happens there will be signs.

Before this happens, there will be signs. Jesus speaks first of signs that attend the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the city itself. Nation will rise against nation, earthquakes famines and so on. **And there will be persecution of His disciples who will have to stand before governors and kings and give an account of Christ and they will be hated by all for it.** And then, the city of Jerusalem would be surrounded and they will trample the city underfoot.

Jesus predicted it, and it did happen in AD 70. The Romans devastated Jerusalem so completely that Jesus words aren’t an exaggeration. Not only was the temple destroyed, but over a million people died. They were so ruined that they lost access to food and the inhabitants were resigned to the utmost vulgarity. Some resorted to cannibalism. Jesus, in love, warned his disciples before it happened so they could see the signs and know to prepare themselves and others for it.

The destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem, Jesus teaches, is a kind of prelude to the end of the world. Jerusalem crucified the Son of Man in their midst; they sent God himself away from them, spurning His grace and opening themselves up to destruction. That’s how the end of the world will happen. As mankind continues to rebel against God’s Word and command, God will first begin to withdraw his presence and the world will unravel.

God holds the world together by His word. And when He pulls back His command—(as this wicked and disobedient generation unwisely tells Him to)--there will be signs that the world is coming unglued. “**There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken**.” God’s orderly creation becomes unstable and reverts towards chaos as God turns man over to their lust and leaves them alone without His governing word of command.

The Word of God’s command that tells human beings to “lead sexually pure and decent lives” is the very same word of command that tells Satan “This far you can go and no farther” and keeps him restrained. His word of command that says “if you don’t work you will not be allowed to eat” is the same word of command that tells meteors not to crash into earth, and tells the sun to rise, and tells the crops to grow and the rain to fall. **For generations, unfaithful men have been telling those who preach faithfully God’s commands to shut their mouth, and insodoing have been telling God to shut his mouth.**

Now, God is patient, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But eventually He will listen to them, and begin to remove his gracious governance from the world, and such destruction as the world has never known it will know in that day. Satan will not be so restrained; Antichrist will assert himself to Christ’s throne on earth; and there will be enormous temptation to go along with it, to be a child of the times, because if you go against it, it will make your life harder in that time. But, those who go along with it will eat and drink and be merry and forget about God. They will gain success and worldly favour in this life, all the while losing their soul. But those who endure in the faith will be saved.

(2) Secondly, as God withdraws His gracious hand before returning it will reveal all manner of evil in the world to be judged. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be made known (Luke 12:2). Vengeance is mine said the Lord, I will repay.

Evil lurks in the darkness; and like mice in the basement that run to the cracks when the light comes on, evil does not like to show itself because then it can be judged (Eph 5:11-12). Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14), so that his true colors cannot be seen except with eyes of faith. So too, should God return in glory while evil is still hiding, the justice of His Judgment would not be plainly seen to every eye.

But as He withdraws His gracious governance from the world, the evildoers and the evil one himself comes out into broad daylight. And some of the shamelessness we see around us today makes this plain even now. For instance, people do and say things on the television—available in every home across the nation and the world—people on tv do and say things that would have shamed them to death even fifty-years ago. The language, sexual immodesty, the utter shamelessness—it too is a sign of God turning the world over to its lusts and desires.

And so, when the Son of Man returns as Judge, evil will have absolutely no defense to offer. Evildoers will be caught in the act. There will be no pleas of ignorance; or pretense of innocence. All eyes from all over the world will have seen the evil unmasked. **So too they will see the Son of Man as He judges it in perfect righteousness.**  The man of Lawlessness will be revealed and those who follow Him will be doing so in open and inexcusable defiance to God’s perfect law. And they will be judged by their deeds that once they did in secret, but in the end they have willingly brought into the light and exposed for Judgment.

And those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, they too will be revealed for the final day. As God withdraws His hand, he does not withdraw His Word or His Spirit from those who have faith. They will continue to profess God’s truth. Only the external order of the world will be unraveled. The days are coming, and indeed they are already here, when professing your Christian faith will be bad for business and where you will not legally be able to raise your children in the fear and instruction of the Lord. The days are coming and are already here when people with six figure salaries, second homes, and leisure activities that cost a living wage to sustain simply shrug and say “oh well” as their church shuts its doors for lack of offerings. They will stand before the Son of Man and trip over their tongue as they try to explain to the almighty Judge how they just couldn’t afford a pastor to preach the pure word, and to shepherd a church for their children to grow up in.

When Jesus’ words--which will never pass away--aren’t as readily accessible it will be revealed who has real valued them and kept them. It will reveal who has faith. The days are coming and they are already here when all hearts will be revealed and all who traded their baptismal birthright of faith for a pittance of worldly treasures where moth and rust decay will stand before the Son of Man speechless and without excuse.

Repent. Stay awake. Satan desires to sift you as wheat and will be unleashed if He isn’t already. But Christ has prayed for you; purchased you with his blood; and promises to preserve you by the power of His word. Keep it. Treasure it above all worldly Goods; as more precious than gold or silver or a nice pension or piece of real estate. Repent and believe the Gospel for the forgiveness of your sins. And they are forgiven and forgotten before God.

(3) Finally this…those who persevere in His word and do not give up will be preserved through this great tribulation that will culminate in their redemption. Christ has told you the signs—cataclysmic, foreboding, and fearful signs—some that the world has been seeing for a long time now. But these signs of an unraveling of creation, of a world coming unglued are not to cause you fear. They in and of themselves they are fearful things, but when you know their meaning, they are really signs of comfort, and assurances for faith. Because what they mean is that your redemption is drawing near.

For the faithful, Judgment day is Redemption day. Christ bought you with his blood, poured it on your body in baptism; put it in you mouth in Holy Communion, put it in your ear by His word. And on “Redemption day” He will come to claim you whom he has bought and take you to Him. And every earthquake, and every famine…every election outcome resulting from social confusion and fear; every time you are hated for Jesus’ Names sake, you Redemption is nearer. Things have to get worse before they get better, and that’s progress. The sooner the world ends, the sooner your full and final redemption begins.

And yet, in these last days Jesus gives several admonitions to you who have his word in your heart and on your lips. **First, when you see these signs straighten up and lift your head, because you have no reason to fear these fearful happenings.** Yes, there is horrible injustice; and it’s getting worse and you should help your neighbor as best you can when he suffers the ravages of an unraveling world. But watch yourselves, because these things are no cause for worry or despair or drunkenness, because it means your redeemer is coming on clouds of glory to set all things right.

Just like a fig tree gives signs assuring you of the coming summer; so too these cataclysmic things are signs assuring you Jesus is on His way to reverse the tide, judge the world, throw all the unjust hypocrites in hells eternal prison; and He will take you by the hand as you enter the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem that came down from heaven and was planted right upon the ashes of the old creation now burned away.

Second, Stay awake at all times, praying for strength to endure what’s to come. It won’t be easy, but the end will come. **We don’t know God’s timetable, but we know He has one, and He will not have you suffer forever.** There will be and is the temptation to keep Christ and his salvation to yourself in order to get along in the world, to keep business running smooth, to not offend people, to keep family gatherings civil, to keep outward institutional peace in the church. But you have been commanded by Christ to confess Him before men, both when it’s convenient and when it’s not, so that they too might turn and be saved. And faith that remains in the heart but doesn’t come to the mouth will wither and die, just like any muscle that gets no exercise. Study the word often, pray the word often, speak the word of God often, and write it on your heart. Because Jesus words are the only thing that will not pass away and they preserve you until the day when you will stand before the Son of Man and are revealed before every eye to have been justified.

In conclusion, There will be a day--no one knows when--that the world as we know it will come to an end. (1) **eventually God will withdraw his gracious hand from the world and it will begin to unravel and fall apart and these are signs to prepare you for it.** (2) God’s doing so will reveal all manner of evil in the world and expose everyone’s deeds for open judgment. (3) You who persevere in His word and do not give up will be preserved through this great tribulation. You have every reason to take heart and remain in good cheer, because in the end you will see your redemption.