**Where the Vultures Gather**

Based on [Matthew 24:15-28](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt24.15-28)

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Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

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In today’s Gospel lesson our dear Lord Jesus Christ foretells the devastation of the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish homeland, as well as the end of the whole world.

St. Matthew blends these two themes, as no doubt Jesus did when he said the words. We know that every catastrophe and every calamity and every massive tragedy is a sign of the end of the world**. So when Jesus does this with the destruction of Jerusalem, it is appropriate.** Only a fool doesn’t see God’s judgment of the world in catastrophic events. They are judgments, but they are signs and reminders that God is not distant, nor is he happy with the way the world is going. He won’t be happy with the world until he comes on the last day, cleanses it from all evil and sets the lamb upon the throne.

The world is foolish to think that the angels rejoice over advances in medical science, or over curbside recycling, or over a new diet or other merely human things. He allows us to discover things that help us along, but the world always uses them, in the end to build another story on the tower of Babel. **The world rejoices in things that give it a sense of independence and progress; but God could send a legion of angels right now to cure cancer, save the environment, and lower everyone’s cholesterol without the slightest effort.** But He doesn’t. He gives us more than we deserve, but that’s a little thing in his eyes. The world look forward to a fabled day when it finds a way to solve all its problems…so it can rejoice. But all the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents.

Some forty years before it happened; Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. He said this, “**15**“*So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),* ***16****then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.* ***17****Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house,* ***18****and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.*”

What marks the beginning of the siege and destruction of the Holy City Jerusalem, home of the Jews, is an outrageous act of idolatry. apparently, some image of a false god or Caesar maybe, some “**Golden calf” was taken into the throneroom of God in the temple, “standing in the holy place” Jesus says.** God is holy, there is none beside him, and to do such an abominous act is the trigger and the sign of God’s wrath. He withdraws his hand, Satan rushes in and the Romans siege the city.

I have heard historical descriptions of the aftermath of this destruction. Flavius Josephus, historian of the day, records such horrific conditions, starvation and death, that I won’t mention them. **Jesus doesn’t either,. “Desolation” is a good enough word to describe it.** Jesus simply warns his hearers and says, I’ll spare descriptions of the horror but believe me, you don’t want to be anywhere near Jerusalem when this judgment happens. Flee to the mountains, leave your things behind and run. Those who have loved ones to take care of will be in the worst positions, they can’t leave them and run; but to be unable to outrun the destruction, to be caught in the fray is simply unimaginable.

The world is such a stench in the nostrils of God, that it is emotionally difficult for someone with the spiritual sight of faith to consider it. The world just doesn’t believe that idolatry is that big of a deal. I don’t just mean worshipping graven images, but the practice making things equal or superior to God. **It’s like watching a child play with explosives, the child doesn’t understand the danger, but that doesn’t mean it’s safe in the least.** The world is not a spiritually safe place. And friends, don’t be deceived. The television, radio, and everything flash images before your eyes to make the world seem so normal that it can’t possibly be so bad. After all, “It’s the fanatic that warns people God’s wrath is coming upon the world” they say. “The well-adjusted person laughs, and jokes, and makes merry, and thus proves their sanity”, they say. The crazy fanatic says things that will make people panic; the normal person calms people down and tells them to eat their poisoned pabulum. O what a warped deception and strong delusion.

Well Jesus is no crazy fanatic. In fact, he warns of these things so that those who hear would have time to prepare. “**See I have told you beforehand.**” Most people get irritable when they get a little behind as small deadlines approach. Most people get grumpy, and less patient with others as they panic over their own unpreparedness. Well, nothing leads to more disorganized, loveless, inhuman and ungodly behavior and temperament than someone who is caught unprepared when disaster strikes.

Jesus says that when the world comes to an end, it will be just such a catastrophe. And the days leading up to it will get worse and worse. The time is near, but it is not yet here. There is time to prepare, but who will prepare? **There are people who don’t go to the doctor because they are afraid they might be told they have cancer or some other terminal disease.** They are fools, believing ignorance is bliss, they trade hard to face realities for a false sense of security. Ignorance is bliss, but not forever. The wise know this, seek true knowledge and prepare for the day. The fool simply return to their folly.

And here is where false prophets and false christs come in. There will be those who say, “**It’s all going to be alright. God loves everybody you love and he is happy with everybody your happy with, and things are only going to get better in the way you want them to get better. Trust the world, trust the government, trust the latest studies, trust your heart, and trust me.**” And so, the spiritual “abomination of desolation”,--the trust of the world above God--is continually being set up in the holy place. And where there are fleshly people who only want to indulge in the flesh rather than mortify it, there will be flesh peddlers of the world, false prophets false christs. And the worldly minded will flock to them, as vultures to a corpse.

The end of the world is coming, and the world is on a downward spiral of evil and destruction until that happens. It will get so bad, Jesus says, ***that no one would be saved if it were allowed to go on longer than the appointed time***. Evidently even the strongest faith in the world wouldn’t be able to withstand what’s would come. But the elect will be saved.

God will preserve his flock and save his people. Those who have heard this word have nothing to fear. **Jesus has already paid for your sins, and for those who acknowledge their sin and repent, he freely forgives you by the blood of his cross.** It may look like those who have more wealth, better paying jobs, bigger churches, wider network of powerful friends in the world have an unfair advantage. It might seem that God is unfair to you who are faithful and have none of these things.

But wisdom knows that worldly entanglements are false blessings. As the world gets closer to the end, those heavily invested in the world will be more likely to go down with the world. **Their sprout of faith, though they have it now, will be pulled down with the weeds.** Just as it is more difficult for pregnant and nursing mothers to flee disaster; so with those who have ties to the world.

The world will not save you from death and evil, but there is one who will. **When the Son of Man comes again, he will set all things right; disease, the environment, famine and war...the world won’t fix these things, he will.** And he will give you your heart’s desire on that day, that glorious magnificent day, the day of the Lord when he comes in glory to make all things new.