

There are many ways to think about how we might grow in our walk with the Lord. In the Gospel, we heard Jesus' admonition concerning the final judgment. It's pretty easy to gloss over these words as disciples of Christ, for we've already received the promise of eternal life. However, upon closer study we discover what Jesus said includes his teaching about how we should live between now and the judgment. This morning we're going to talk about what this means for us in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

LUKE 21:25-36

Jesus said, "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, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

34 "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Jesus talked about the signs of the coming judgment, that there will be **"signs in the sun and moon and stars and on earth distress of nations" (v. 25)**. Earlier he said there will be **"wars and tumults,"** and there will be **"great earthquakes,"** and so forth.

As I reflect on what the Lord said, I believe what he wants us to see is the instability of the world and to remember how much we need him. He wants us to remember our

calling to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them everything he has taught us just as he commanded in the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

Indeed, Jesus wants us to empathize with a hurting world, to seize the moment, and to do everything we can in our own lifetimes to bring his message of redemption to our neighbors.

It was in the context of this message Jesus taught us three things about how he wants us to live:

1. He said, **“straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (v. 28);**
2. He said, **“watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life” (v. 34);**
3. And he said, **“stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength” (v. 36).**

In the first teaching Jesus told us to **“straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.”** This means that we must believe God’s promises of forgiveness and the final resurrection, for this faith will give us courage amidst the darkness all around, that we can hold our heads up high and declare, “Our Lord reigns!” Courage is the key word in this teaching.

The Lord calls us his children, his sons and daughters, heirs of his Heavenly Kingdom. He wills that we would take hold of this calling and relinquish everything that gets in the way of it.

Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that **“When we respond to God’s call, we intentionally separate ourselves from our previous existence in order to create a new life.”**

A **“new life”**: No longer are we pandering to the whims of the world, for we’ve been liberated from the lies, and we know the truth, and knowing the truth we live in hope, a hope which does not constrain us, but a hope which is a vision for a world redeemed by Christ our Lord, a hope which is fed by the very heart of God.

When I was 15-years old, my best friend and I had great visions for our future, which included becoming fabulously rich. We spent hours talking about the kinds of

investments we would make and businesses we would build. And we had a bet: We agreed that the one who got his Rolls Royce first would have the pleasure of watching the other one wash it!

But things changed. When my friend graduated from high school he heard God's call to a life of service in the U.S. Marine Corp. He began as an enlisted grunt and finished as a decorated officer 24 years later. Myself, I heard God's call to become a pastor. And guess what: Neither one of us owns a Rolls Royce!

What changed for us was not whether or not we thought a Rolls Royce would be a wonderful car to own. Rather, what changed was we each received a personal call from God, and we both answered those calls. Neither one of us became financially rich, but we're both rich in spirit for how the Lord chose to use us.

That's what Jesus was talking about. That's the elephant in the room. It's the great question that lies on each one of our hearts: How are we living the "**new life**" the Lord has called us to live? To take hold of our new life in Christ demands courage.

The second thing the Lord taught us here is to "**watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life**" (v. 34). The key word is PERSPECTIVE. Drugs and alcohol desensitize our hearts and minds to our greatest needs. And the "**cares of this life**," or worrying about things we cannot change, takes our attention off the things we can change.

I hesitate to bring it up because of how strong our individual feelings may be. However, because of the wreckage across our land I feel compelled to say a little bit about our country's politics: In a word, it is a disaster. But not for the reason you might think. Regardless of who one voted for, our political situation has been divisive and hateful; it has been a disgusting display of the darkest side of our humanity. Many of us, even as God's beloved children, have gotten sucked into it. Like a hurricane the spirit of this thing has ripped through our families and friendships, communities and cities, and it's not over yet.

Friends in Christ, what's going on in the world does not define us; the political machine does not feed us; and the false promises of men do not encourage us. The cares of this world weigh heavily on our hearts, but they should not. In the Lord perspective is everything.

The key word for the Lord's third teaching is PRAYER. Jesus said, **"stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength" (v. 36)**. Staying awake is about remaining alert, paying attention, taking stock of what we're up against, thinking about what we're going to do about it, and praying.

Prayer: It's so easy to leave God out of the picture, or to ask him to bless us after we've already made up our minds about what we're going to do! But the Lord beckons us to pray **"that you may have strength" (v. 36)**.

Going to war with pitchforks and shovels against an army with tanks, guns, and nuclear warheads would be foolish. But that is what we're doing when we go to war against the devil and this world without prayer. Indeed, we are at war, engaged in a spiritual battle, and it's for the souls of the people among whom we live. Prayer is our principle weapon in this work we do.

Finally, let us consider for a moment the context of this teaching. A few verses earlier we read that **"While some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, (Jesus) said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Luke 21:5-6)**.

God was at the center of worship for the original builders of the temple. Yet over the years pride had infected the hearts of the people, and they no longer worshipped God; but they worshipped the work of their hands.

Here at Faith Lutheran Church, we're not focused on our place, as lovely as it is. Rather, our focal point is our work, how we're going to live, how we're going to love one another, how we're going to worship, how we're going to perform acts of service in our community, how we're going to share the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

St. Peter wrote, **1 Peter 2:4-5, "As you come to (Jesus), a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."**

If only the people of Jerusalem had understood that the temple which they held in such high esteem was only a symbol of their higher calling. Friends in Christ, this is our calling,

to be a spiritual house, the house of God. Jesus is our cornerstone. Everything we are rests on Him. And it is this new way of life which we live in our own community.

Friends in Christ, let us take heed of our Lord's teaching; let us be courageous, despite the darkness all around; let us have the right perspective – God's perspective – about what's important in this life; and let us be prayerful.

This week let us live the "new life" the Lord has bestowed on us as a gift to our own community.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of the Lord. Amen.