

Dear saints whose redemption has drawn near, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we approach the end of the church year, we speak of the end things. With the end thoughts comes all kinds of fanciful speculations. Truth be told, we probably do not spend much time in our day to day busyness thinking about such things. We speak of tomorrow as if it is a certainty. We go about our business, our jobs, our family events, shopping, fighting off traffic, and those things we are concerned about everyday and don't think, "you know what, today could be the last day of the cosmos."

We see our church building, our school, our city, our way of life, and do any of us really think, "this could possibly end." We plan to hand things down to our children, we have one and five year plans and even beyond that. How can everything for which we've worked so hard come to an abrupt end?

As many admired the renovation of Herod at the temple, seeing the elaborate materials and the finest workmanship there was around, Jesus gives to them the unforeseen reality: "the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another." The temple, the epicenter of Jerusalem, the place built as a dwelling place for Yahweh among His people. And Jesus says it will be torn down.

"When will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" Jesus prepares them for the near and distant future, the coming day of judgment on Jerusalem and the coming day of judgment on the world.

Jesus tells that there will be wild and fanciful claims in regards to the end things. "Many will come in his name, claiming to be I AM, Yahweh, the Lord. Do not be led astray. There will be wars and rumors of wars, do not be afraid, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." Then reports of nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plagues. Add the continuing economic struggles of the country today, and it sounds like Jesus is reading the headlines from Nevada Appeal or any number of other newspapers. It's the end of the world as we know it, the cosmos is spiraling towards its death. End times living was not promised to be easy living.

Dear saints, you will be persecuted, arrested, or even brought before the kings, public rulers. Some have died and will continue to die as they are persecuted. You will be called to bear witness, to give your

martyria. You will be delivered up even by parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. You will be hated by some because you bear the name of Christ.

This can be one of the most troubling thoughts for Christians. If I am called to be a witness, how will I know what to say, how will I know if I say the right things, what if I screw up and give a bad witness? “Settle it in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.” Jesus never leaves his saints without a word of witness. Don’t worry ahead of time about what you will say when it comes your time to speak. Receive what he gives to you in your readings, in weekly worship, in our liturgy and hymnody, and in Bible studies as the raw material for the time when you must speak. You will have a mouth and wisdom, it comes to you in His Word by the Holy Spirit and your mouth will be the Lord’s mouth and His wisdom.

Hated, persecuted, betrayed, some even killed by family and friends! Don’t expect Christianity to be popular, this is hardly the health and wealth church or the compromised “gospel” that passes as Christianity in our society in some music, television, and religious best-sellers. Are you surprised? Those who saw the splendor of the temple certainly were.

But there is a promise given in the midst of these warnings. “Not a hair of your head will perish.” The world as we know it will die. Nations and empires rise and fall. Institutions, even individual congregations, have their lifespan. The splendid temple in Jerusalem toppled over at the hands of the Roman army surrounded and besieged the city in AD 70, just as Jesus has said. There are wars and rumors of wars, persecutions, and much more going on now, just as Jesus has said. But not a head on your head will perish.

Dear Christians, you are given your witness. The temple was the place where Yahweh, the Lord, dwelt. It is where he promised to be for his people. It is where the animal sacrifices were made as the people gathered for worship. The Jerusalem temple was there in the flesh, in their midst, true God and true man. The true destruction of the temple would come as the Christ, the Messiah, was destroyed on the cross. This destruction is for you, on your behalf, the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. To you, sinners who are doomed to perish, he gives his destroyed and beaten body and blood and says,

“not a hair of your head will perish.” You are forgiven, this man, the Word made flesh is your witness and wisdom.

Great distress, wrath against people, darkness loomed over the earth as Word made flesh took on the wrath of God and received your condemnation of death and hell. Your sin atoned for, the sacrifice made, you are redeemed and reconciled to God. Risen from the grave, he gives you his life, he gives you the promise of the resurrection and life of the world to come.

There will be struggles, there will be things that may seem fearful, signs on the earth, distress of nation, people fainting with fear and foreboding. There is no need to be bent over in fear and fainting, but straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is near. Life in the eternal presence of the Lord, glorified with the Son of Man, all the saints joined in the heavens worshiping around the throne, is near. Don't be like pagans who have reason to fear the end. “Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”  
(Luke 21:32)

The Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory, and he will come for you. The presence of God, the temple is here for you, in His Word, he comes to you in baptism, and he comes to you in his body and blood, and in Him is your redemption. Given his gifts, given faith in this word and promise, he will come again with power and great glory, not for your destruction but to usher you to heavenly banquet table. Your redemption, given, draws near.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.