

Luke 21:5–28: ⁵And 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.” ⁷And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” ⁸And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²²for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵“And 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, ²⁶people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

There’s No Need to Fear, Jesus Is Here!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The text for today’s message is the Gospel reading from St. Luke, the 21st chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Those of us who grew up in the 60s probably remember with fondness Saturday morning cartoons. Animated features like Spider-Man, Mighty Mouse, Tennessee Tuxedo, Fantastic Four, and the Jetsons ruled on Saturday morning. Those of us who hated getting up on weekdays for school had no problem getting up early to watch our favorite celluloid heroes. And of course it was primarily cereal and toy companies that sponsored Saturday morning cartoons.

One of my favorite Saturday morning cartoons was Underdog. Whenever his love interest, Sweet Polly Purebred, was in the evil clutches of such villains as Simon Bar Sinister or Riff Raff, Shoeshine Boy—that's the Clark Kent persona of Underdog—would run into a phone booth where he would activate his superpowers and become Underdog—destroying the phone booth in the process. Now Underdog, voiced by Wally Cox, always spoke in rhyming couplets. And his favorite saying was, "There's no need to fear, Underdog is here!" Then off he'd go to rescue Polly Purebred—usually destroying something in the process!

Well, I want you to know today that no matter what villains you face in this world—from sin and temptation to persecution and strife, to family problems and sickness, and death—there's no need to fear, Jesus is here.

And for Christians, that's the greatest comfort of all. Because, as Jesus makes clear in today's Gospel reading, there's a lot of things in this world that could cause us to fear.

Looking at the Gospel reading more closely, there are three things that Jesus wants to make clear to His disciples: First, this world will come to an end—but not before there is much turmoil in the creation and among humanity. Second, before the end comes, things may not be pleasant for His disciples, but there will be much opportunity to bear witness to His truth. And Third, follow Jesus and you'll be safe when the end does come.

First: It's an historical fact that Jesus' prophesy about Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Roman army besieged the city, starved it's inhabitants, and then invaded the city and utterly destroyed the temple. The Christians in Jerusalem listened to what Jesus said about the end of Jerusalem. And when they saw the signs, they obeyed Jesus and fled to the safety of another city. The Jews, who didn't listen to Jesus and remained in Jerusalem, suffered greatly under the brutal conditions of the siege. And those that didn't die of starvation were slaughtered at the edge of the Roman sword.

To this day, all that exists of the temple is one of its foundations, the West Wall—just as Jesus said: "...and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled?"

Because Jesus was right about Jerusalem, you can be certain He is right about the end of the world—it's going to happen. But Jesus isn't giving you signs to indicate the NEARNESS the end, but rather signs to indicate the CERTAINTY of the end—so that you don't become complacent and unprepared. So, rather than look at earthquakes and droughts, wars and political unrest, persecutions and betrayals as signs of the apocalypse, Jesus wants you to see them as signs that this world does have an expiration date. To quote one of our Lutheran seminary professors, "In short, wars, rumors of war, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false prophets, persecutions, defections, and betrayals are not signs telling us when the end will come but rather signs telling us that the end will come."

By assuring you that the end will come, Jesus wants you to be prepared. And how do you prepare for the end? Not by listening to the world, that's for sure! But by listening to your Lord and Savior with ears that hear through God's gift of repentance and faith.

While the end of the world may give us reason to pause, the fact that before the end comes, things may not be pleasant for Jesus' disciples, might give us reason to fear.

When Jesus called you to be one of His disciples—to follow Him to eternal life—He didn't promise you an easy life. In our text, He says: "But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. . . . You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death."

As a friend of the living God in Christ Jesus, you're an enemy of this dying world. I know that there are Christians who want to compromise with the world and embrace what the world embraces, such as the sexual revolution. But the sexual revolution is a perfect example of the certainty that this is a broken and dying world. From my own perspective, I see nothing but brokenness and heartache coming out of mankind's rebellion against God and His Word.

Standing as God's standard bearer in this world may bring persecution and suffering, but Jesus said that this will be your opportunity to bear witness: "Settle it therefore 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." What great joy it was for Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles—even if it meant he would be doing so in prison. And in our Epistle reading, Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians, "As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good."

What great good you can do for this dying world by standing on the truth and helping those who are hurt by the world's lies! And you can do it, because Jesus is with you!

I began this sermon by talking about Underdog. In a world under siege by sin and satan, we are underdogs—the team that’s likely to lose. But in this dying world, where things can be frightening, especially for Christians, you have a Champion who’s overcome the world, and sin, and death—Jesus Christ. He’s no dead prophet—but our risen and living Lord and King.

And there’s no need to fear, because He’s right here with you. He’s promised never to leave you or forsake you. He’s promised to be with you to the very end of the age. He’s promised that where two or three are gathered in His name, there His is among them.

And today and every Lord’s Day, as you gather in the Name of Jesus, He is here. In Word and Sacrament. In Confession and Absolution. In the Hymns and the Prayers. Jesus is here to take your sins and fears away. Jesus is here to keep you safe in this world and prepare you for His return.

But you may say, “Christians suffer and die in this world everyday. How is Jesus keeping them safe? It’s true, you may suffer and die because you bear the name of Jesus, but in Jesus, you’re always “safe.” As Jesus said, “¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

There’s two words here to think upon—death and perish. You may die—and the fact is, we’re all destined to suffer temporal death—that is the wages of sin. But as one who is safe in Jesus, there’s no reason to fear—though you die, you’ll never perish—meaning to die eternally. That’s why there’s no reason to fear, for those who have died with Jesus to sin in Holy Baptism, not only rise to newness of life, but also to eternal life when Jesus visibly returns to raise the dead and give all who believe in Him everlasting life.

Conclusion

Now, Underdog was just an imaginary character in a cartoon. He was a dog who, when he rescued his beloved Polly Purebred, destroyed a lot of stuff. Jesus is your real Savior who conquered a dying world and lives and reigns to all eternity. There's no reason to fear, He's here with you now and always. And when He returns visibly in all His glory, He's going to destroy all that is evil once and for all—and on that day when the world falls down in fear, for those who believe in Jesus, “straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

In Jesus' Name. Amen.