

25th Sunday after Pentecost November 18, 2018

27th Sunday after the Trinity Proper 28 (33)

Year B – the Gospel of Mark

LUTHERAN

LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

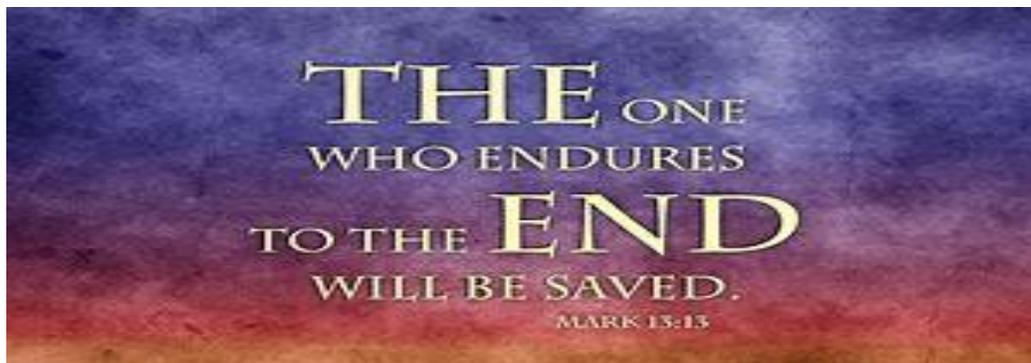
*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the
rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

Available on line at:

- ✦ www.bethlehemplutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies
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Gather and be blessed:

- ✦ **Thursdays at 10 AM:** Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44134
- ✦ **Fridays at 7 PM in a house church setting:** For details, contact Harold Weseloh at puritaspastor@hotmail.com
- ✦ **First Sunday of the month at 11 AM:** St. Philip Lutheran Church, 11315 Regalia Ave., Cleveland, OH 44104



<http://carolinasnalc.org/2015/09/05/september-5-2015/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 508 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 611

“The day is surely drawing near”

“Bartholomew Ringwaldt was born at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, in 1530, and was a Lutheran pastor at Langfield, in Prussia, where he died, 1598. His hymns resemble Luther's in their simplicity and power. Several of them were written to comfort himself and others in the sufferings they endured from famine, pestilence, fire and floods. In 1581, he published "Hymns for the Sundays and Festivals of the whole Year."

--Annotations of the Hymnal, Charles Hutchins, M.A. 1872.”

“...Ringwaldt exercised a considerable influence on his contemporaries as a poet of the people, as well as by his hymns properly so called. He was a true German patriot, a staunch Lutheran, and a man who was quite ready to face the consequences of his plain speaking. His style is as a rule clear and good, though his rhymes are often enough halting; and he possessed considerable powers of observation and description...”

Rev. Philip A. Peter, b. 1832, Hesse-Homburg, Germany. Evan. Luth. pastor, Verona, Preble Co., Ohio (Joint Synod of Ohio) *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal*, 1908.”

- https://hymnary.org/text/the_day_is_surely_drawing_near#Author
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjnBmXtcxMM> Organist is Mark Peters. The prelude for hymn 508 in Lutheran Service Book is from Hymn Prelude Library, Vol. 3 (tunes D, E).
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJcXREt1nwM> “The Concordia Singers Library-Choral II”, Concordia Publishing House
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiI_ZlaICgl Bell Choir ... at Calvary Lutheran Church in Kansas City, MO. Steve Hohnstadt, director

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

Daniel 12:1-3; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading from Daniel or 1 Samuel 1:4-20 (Next week: Last Sunday of the Church Year, Reign of Christ or Christ, the King Sunday: Isaiah 51:4-6 or Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; RCL, the same reading from Daniel or 2 Samuel 23:1-7)

“First of all, congratulations on following the lectionary and taking the challenge to preach on some of the really difficult passages of Daniel.

The exciting narratives from the first half of the book of Daniel (1-6) have served as preaching favorites for all types of congregations, particularly younger ones. You have stories of lions, fire, and stories of resistance against “the man,” in the form of King Nebuchadnezzar... In contrast, the second half of the book of Daniel (7-12) presents as much more difficult sermon material with the four apocalyptic visions. Apocalyptic genres can be exciting, but they bring significant challenges in preaching such cryptic texts...

Daniel 12 launches the final scene of the four apocalyptic visions of Daniel. In the prior section, Daniel sees an angel who speaks of a “Prince of Persia” who will wage war and defeat

many powers, and in the process defile the temple. A king from the North shall arise and wreak havoc on the land. Some will flee (Trans-Jordanian states), some will fall (Egypt), and some will follow this king (Libya, Ethiopia), but the king abruptly dies. As with any powerful monarch, this event is expected to bring a period of chaos in the wake of a sudden powershift.

At this point, Daniel 12:1-3 introduces a transition in both time and space. The opening phrase “In that time” signals a temporal shift from the present to a future eschaton (the end times, the return of Christ)...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3856 **Roger Nam**
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon

The Time of the End

12 “At that time shall arise Michael*, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above;^[a] and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

- a. [Daniel 12:3](#) Hebrew *the expanse*; compare [Genesis 1:6–8](#)

* “Michael is the name of the archangel of the Lord. He is referred to several times in Holy Writ. In the 10th chapter of Daniel it is stated, “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me” (10:13). Then in v. 21, “There is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.” Again in chapter 12, “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people” (v. 1). Turning to the New Testament we read in the Epistle of Jude, “Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke thee” (v. 9). And finally, in the last book of the Bible we are told, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (Rev. 12:7)...”

- <http://www.concordialutheranconf.com/1996/09/02/st-michael-and-all-angels/>
“The Concordia Lutheran Conference (CLC) is not a church in the Scriptural use of that word (as some synodical organizations seek to represent themselves), but is an organization of local churches or congregations bound together in true God-pleasing fellowship based on complete unity of faith and confession in accordance with God’s Word...”

Read more about this group of congregations at
<http://www.concordialutheranconf.com/>

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“Today's reading from Daniel 12 consists of an apocalyptic scenario -- an unveiling (which is the meaning of the Greek word apokalypsis from which our term "apocalyptic" comes) of the end of human history... In this scenario, God's angelic agent, Michael, will intervene during a time of intense distress and bring deliverance to the faithful who are living, while some of the dead will be resurrected and judged...

Gaining Perspective

As a way of gaining perspective on such disorder, apocalyptic literature uses rich symbols to imagine the end of human history. After all, when viewed from an endpoint, chaotic events no longer seem so chaotic but instead may be seen as part of a larger discernible pattern. In this passage, the time of the end promises to bring deliverance from distress, injustice, and untimely death through resurrection...

What Comes After?

One of the great ironies about the end of days as it is depicted in the Bible (and often in popular culture) is that it is never simply a portrayal of the end. It is inevitably a portrayal of a new beginning, a turning point in human reality that becomes “the end and after.” Daniel 12 does not imagine an elaborate “after” (in contrast to Revelation 21-22), but nevertheless, it begins to hope for a time and place when justice and righteousness regain the upper hand; a time in which the gap between humanity and the divine is overcome.

Such apocalyptic imaginings are never just descriptions of what is out there. Rather, portrayals of “the end and after” are always reflections of one's deepest yearnings about God and the world. As such they have the power to turn human knowing into faithful action; to urge readers to discern righteousness and justice in this world instead of simply waiting for it in the next. Daniel invites us into the rich and fantastic world of the apocalyptic imagination and asks us, what do we imagine the “end and after” to look like? What are our deepest yearnings about God and the world?”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1510
[Amy Merrill Willis](#) Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Lynchburg College,
Lynchburg, VA

Psalm 16; RCL, Psalm 16 or 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Psalm 93; RCL, the same reading)

“...Commentaries often try to figure out the background of the Psalm in question. Who was the author? What was the occasion? What sort of liturgical background does it have? Is this pre-exilic or post-exilic? These are all good questions, and, perhaps, they are even important in their own way.

It's just that sometimes they seem to miss the point. And I can't see myself regaling the congregation with the various theories about its original setting, or testing their patience on whether, for example, the “holy ones” of verse 3 are actually holy, or are religious syncretists. I'll have them either sleeping or rebelling before I'm half way through.

Why? Because that's not the way we read Psalms, not even we preachers. We read them for their strong words of faith, their honest questions, their crushing laments. We take confidence in their depictions of God's goodness, strength, compassion, and kingly rule. More than that, we read them as our own Psalm; the words become our words, not the words of some long ago figure at a far-off time and place.

I noticed that a number of commentaries either ignored or skimmed over the fact that both the apostles Peter (Acts 2: 34-38) and Paul (Acts 13: 35) directly linked the last verses of Psalm 16 to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. In fact, the apostles combed the Psalms for every possible way in which they might refer to Jesus life and death. This might be an opportunity to do a little teaching on that remarkable way of reading the Psalms (or the whole Old Testament for that matter..."

- http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-28b/?type=the_lectionary_psalms Leonard Vander Zee
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You Will Not Abandon My Soul

A Miktam^[a] of David.

16 Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."

³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.^[b]

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after^[c] another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.

⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.

⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

⁷ I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.^[d]

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being^[e] rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.

¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.^[f]

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

- a. [Psalm 16:1](#) Probably a musical or liturgical term *
- b. [Psalm 16:3](#) Or *To the saints in the land, the excellent in whom is all my delight, I say:*
- c. [Psalm 16:4](#) Or *who acquire*
- d. [Psalm 16:7](#) Hebrew *my kidneys instruct me*
- e. [Psalm 16:9](#) Hebrew *my glory*

f. [Psalm 16:10](#) Or see the pit

* **Miktam** (Hebrew: מִקְטָם) is a word that is part of the [Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon](#) whose meaning is not ascertained. It is a "technical term found in [psalm titles](#)" of the [Bible](#).^[1] Miktam is one of several "collections" of psalms which include [David](#), [Asaph](#), [Maskil](#), Mizmor, and [Korah](#).^[2] An example of a *Miktam* of David is [Psalm 16](#). It also occurs in 5 other Psalms, namely [Psalm 56](#), [Psalm 57](#), [Psalm 58](#), [Psalm 59](#) and [Psalm 60](#).^[3] It has been suggested that Miktam may pertain to a "[wind instrument](#)" in Psalm 16, the Miktam of David. Miktam is also understood as a [Babylonian](#) and Hebrew musical term. In philological terms, "Miktam corresponds to the Babylonian *nakamu*, lid, metal cover for a vessel, and the Hebrew word may denote an instrument of percussion like the [tambourine](#) or [cymbal](#)."^[4]—From an earlier listing on Wikipedia

"Psalm 16 is a very problematic psalm, and for a gaggle of reasons:

1. Most scholars consider this to be a Song of Confidence or Trust like Psalm 23, yet it begins with a very lament-like plea for help in verse 1
2. The intractable verses 3-4 are among the most untranslatable verses in the book of Psalms, if not in the entire Old Testament... Regardless of one's decision in this matter, the psalmist is clearly opting for Yahweh over other gods.
3. Virtually everyone reads the first word of verse 2 as "I say" (some LXX witnesses, Syriac) despite its clear reading of "you have said" (*amart*) in the Masoretic Text.... Again, there is no practical way to resolve this enigma.
4. Ever since Peter preached on this text at the first Pentecost (Acts 2), the church has read this psalm as a messianic prophecy of Christ's resurrection. More on this later!
5. The psalm's structure and progression of thought continue to baffle one and all with its obscurity...

Be that as it may, the obvious reason for the inclusion of Psalm 16 as a response to this week's First Reading from Daniel is found in verse 10 and its possible allusion to life beyond the grave. A similar promise is contained in Daniel 12:2. Should the preacher "go there?" The psalmist, after all, has reinterpreted the traditional land/inheritance imagery of Joshua to sing of his own experience with God. Whether the preacher wants to "go there" in the sermon . . . (as Peter did!), try the psalmist's own spiritualized re-telling of the occupation of the promised land, or stay with the more contextual reading offered here is strictly a matter of personal choice."

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=924 **Mark Throntveit**, Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn. *Professor Lovell offers a very detailed examination of this Psalm in his complete commentary. This is very different than Leonard Vander Zee's approach in the opening commentary. Take some time to read both and see what find in Psalm 16.*

Hebrews 10:11-25; RCL, Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25 (Jude 20-25 or Revelation 1:4b-8; RCL, the same reading from Revelation)

"Last week's lesson from Hebrews 9:24-28 told us that the church is not a system of atonement;

this week's lesson tells us what the church is -- a new community of folks whose consciences have been cleansed by God, who are confident in God's forgiveness and eager to encourage one another "to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). This brief passage brims with joy and certainty: "we have confidence"; "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith;" let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering."

"Confidence" is the keynote of this lesson. In Greek, the word connotes frankness, outspoken speech, openness to public scrutiny, courage, boldness, fearlessness, and joy. It is a characteristic of free citizens who may hold their heads up without shame or fear, looking others directly in the eye. In Roman society, slaves did not exercise such boldness; it belonged to the free members of the household..."

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=418 **Susan Eastman**

Assistant Professor of the practice of the Bible and Christian Formation, Duke Divinity School
Durham, NC

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ^[a] had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds," (Cited from Jer. 31:33)

¹⁷ then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." (Cited from Jer.
31:34)

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The Full Assurance of Faith

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers,^[b] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Footnotes:

1. [Hebrews 10:12](#) Greek *this one*
2. [Hebrews 10:19](#) Or *brothers and sisters*

Cross references:

1. [Hebrews 10:11](#) : [\[Num. 28:3\]](#)
2. [Hebrews 10:11](#) : [See ch. 5:1](#)
3. [Hebrews 10:11](#) : [ver. 1, 4; \[ch. 9:9\]](#)
4. [Hebrews 10:12](#) : [ch. 1:3; See Mark 16:19](#)
5. [Hebrews 10:13](#) : [ch. 1:13; \[1 Cor. 15:25-28\]](#)
6. [Hebrews 10:14](#) : [ver. 1](#)
7. [Hebrews 10:16](#) : [ch. 8:10; Rom. 11:27; Cited from Jer. 31:33](#)
8. [Hebrews 10:17](#) : [ch. 8:12; Cited from Jer. 31:34](#)
9. [Hebrews 10:19](#) : [See ch. 4:16](#)
10. [Hebrews 10:19](#) : [ch. 9:25](#)
11. [Hebrews 10:20](#) : [ch. 9:8; \[John 10:9; 14:6\]](#)
12. [Hebrews 10:20](#) : [ch. 9:3](#)
13. [Hebrews 10:21](#) : [Zech. 6:11-13; \[ch. 4:14\]; See ch. 2:17](#)
14. [Hebrews 10:22](#) : [Ezek. 36:25; \[ch. 12:24; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:2\]](#)
15. [Hebrews 10:22](#) : [ch. 9:14](#)
16. [Hebrews 10:22](#) : [\[1 Cor. 6:11\]](#)
17. [Hebrews 10:23](#) : [ch. 4:14](#)
18. [Hebrews 10:23](#) : [ch. 11:11; See 1 Cor. 1:9](#)
19. [Hebrews 10:24](#) : [\[ch. 3:13\]](#)
20. [Hebrews 10:25](#) : [\[Acts 2:42\]](#)
21. [Hebrews 10:25](#) : [Rom. 13:11-13](#)
22. [Hebrews 10:25](#) : [See 1 Cor. 3:13](#)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Hebrews 10 may please both those who proclaim and those hear the Lectionary texts from Hebrews who feel like saying, “Enough of all that talk about Jesus and blood already. Just tell us what to do.” After all, after almost endlessly teaching us about Jesus and his work, this week’s text finally teaches us what it means to follow Jesus.

Not, however, before returning for what may seem like the 100th time to Hebrews’ theme of Jesus’ superiority to Jewish religious practices. So why does the Preacher go back over the same ground yet again? Perhaps partly because his readers are considering risking their well-being by giving up what God has given them in Christ. They’re thinking about walking away from Jesus and back to their old faith.

To remind his readers of to what they’d be returning, the Preacher notes that Jewish priests had to keep doing the same sacrificial work over and over again. There wasn’t even any place in the old sanctuary for them to sit down and rest from their work because their work was never done.

Yet that’s a problem with religion. You’re never done because you can never do enough...

The Bible calls Jesus’ followers to receive God’s grace with faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible also calls Jesus’ followers to respond to that grace by doing things like praying, loving our enemies and caring for the poor. Yet none of those acts establish a relationship to God. After all, in Jesus Christ, God has already established a loving relationship with God’s people...

So God’s adopted sons and daughters don’t have to stand or run to do anything to connect to God. Since when Jesus “had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right

hand of God,” so can you and I. We can get off the religious treadmill of trying to chase the right beliefs, words and actions...

Hebrews’ Preacher offers several ways God draws God’s adopted sons and daughters close to himself. Of course, if Jesus’ followers don’t look closely enough at *why* we do them, they may seem like just more steps on the religious treadmill.

On top of that, some non-Christians often do some of the same things to which God summons God’s people. That’s the second reason why Hebrews’ author returns again in our chapter to Jesus’ identity and work. Hebrews’ Preacher wants to remind Christians that our doing of those things are responses to God’s connecting us to himself in Jesus Christ...

Finally, however, God invites God’s children to draw near to God by what verse 25 calls “meeting together.” While we usually think of that as meaning we should go to church, the Preacher doesn’t actually say that. He simply calls Christians to meet together. So he may have in mind Christians meeting together not just for worship, but also for fellowship, food, study and even service.

After all, God has graciously adopted us into God’s family. God has transformed you and me from God’s enemies into God’s children, and from strangers into siblings. So when Christians meet together, we come to a kind of family reunion...

Yet when we meet together, especially for worship, God also catches us up in a mysterious heavenly drama. As God draws us near to himself, we’re somehow caught up into the great choir of angels and saints who are also worshiping God. Of course, sometimes you have to squint pretty hard to see that...”

- http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-28b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel Doug Bratt

(Please Note: Advent and Christmas 2018 Resources are now available on CEP:
<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/advent-2018/>)

Mark 13:1-13; RCL, the same reading (Mark 13:24-37 or John 18:33-37; RCL, John 18:33-37)

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 13th Chapter”

“What do you do when you see someone standing on the sidewalk preaching about the end of the world, future destruction, or false messiahs?

Do you hail them as core to your religious beliefs, or do you casually cross to the other side of the street so as to avoid any interaction?

Mark 13 introduces to the reader a fully apocalyptic Jesus, providing content that today we might most appropriately look at askance. Yet, this is Mark’s Jesus, who pronounced from the very beginning the imminent reign of God, who grapples with demons and myriad challenges of other-worldly origin throughout, and who, in chapter 13, gives his longest discourse of the entire gospel in a fully apocalyptic mode...”

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1419 **Micah D. Kiel**

Associate Professor of Theology, St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa

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"I'll be honest, I'm not much of a fan of apocalyptic texts. Not Mark's "little apocalypse," of which we get a taste today, not John the Seer's much bigger apocalypse in Revelation, and not all the ones in between. That being said, it's still the Gospel reading in front of us, so the question becomes what to do with it.

Two suggestions:

1) *We could actually teach folks a bit about Mark's gospel in general and apocalyptic literature more particularly...*

2) *We could invite people to imagine that apocalyptic literature, as odd or unusual or peculiarly future-oriented as it may seem, it's actually very much about the present...*

That's what I've got this week, Working Preacher, in relation to this odd, peculiar, but also very interesting little apocalypse from Mark. Thanks for struggling with it along with me, and blessings on your proclamation and ministry this week. For now, as always, what you do matters!"

➤ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1629>

David Lose Senior Pastor, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

Signs of the End of the Age

³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, *“See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

⁹ *“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved...”*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” **“Praise to You, O Christ”**

“This text reminds me of the old story about the optimistic boy who woke up early on his birthday and looked out his window to see a giant pile of manure in the yard outside. He ran downstairs, got a shovel, and started happily shoveling. "What are you doing?" asked a friend. "I know there's got to be a pony in there somewhere!" said the boy.

This text reflects Jewish apocalyptic theology's vision of the time of suffering preceding the coming of the Messiah, which was sometimes described in terms of labor pains (France, 509). Jesus doesn't specifically answer the question the disciples ask in 13:4 "When?" The wars, earthquakes, and famines show only that the birth is coming, not when it will come.

Mark places this text right before the passion of Jesus. The message to his persecuted community is that they need to prepare to participate in Jesus' suffering and eventual victory by maintaining their witness to the truth in difficult times. The text intends to give them hope and encourage steadfastness in the faith in the face of challenges to come. To seek in this text a detailed schedule of the events of the end-time is to misunderstand its purpose, which is to encourage persistence in the present, not to peer into the future. New Testament scholar Hugh Anderson describes this text as issuing "an appeal to faith to recognize that concealed in the tribulations of the present lies the coming glory of God to be manifested finally in the parousia of the Son of man, whose own triumph is hidden in Jesus' way of the cross" (Anderson, 289). This text on the surface seems filled with bad news and warnings of tribulations to come..:

Assurance #1: In tough times, we will be given words to speak.

Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit (13:11).

I take this to be an assurance that the Holy Spirit will support us in trying times and that we need not be filled with dread over trials that lie ahead. However, I don't take it as an excuse to renege on our responsibilities to use our gifts for God in the present. After all, Mark 13:10 tells us that "The good news must be proclaimed to all nations."

Martin Luther famously tried slacking off once. He depended on the Spirit to take up the slack, but it didn't work out very well. The story goes that Luther, when a professor at the University of Wittenberg, decided one week that he would take Mark 13:11 at face value. He spent no time whatsoever on his Sunday sermon and instead worked on his commentary on the Psalms. He later recounted what happened when he ascended the high pulpit of the Castle Church at Wittenberg and looked out over the sea of expectant faces. "Sure enough, the Holy Spirit spoke to me, and the Spirit said, 'Martin, you didn't prepare!'"

Assurance #2: The one who endures to the end will be saved (13:13).

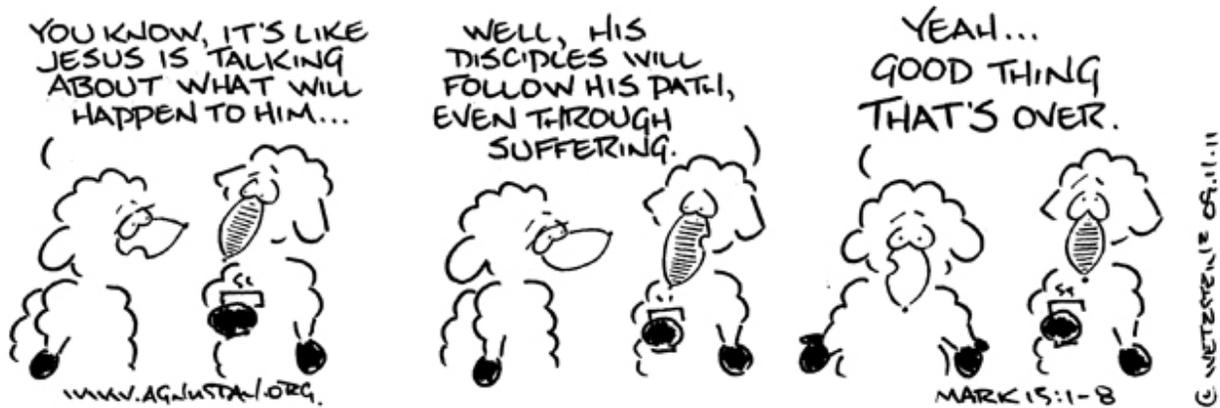
This all begs the question, "When we're going through hell, how can we keep on going?" The answer? By remembering two pieces of very good news concealed in the pile of pains, pangs, and persecutions of this text:

The Holy Spirit supports us in every dreaded encounter and event. The one who keeps the faith and endures to the end will participate in Jesus' victory over death."

- <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/pony-under-alyce-mckenzie-11-12-2012.aspx?p=2> [Alyce McKenzie](#)

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- <http://www.michaelturton.com/Mark/GMark13.html#13.p.1.31> "a complete verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospel of Mark, focusing on the historicity of people, places, events, and sayings in the world of the Gospel of Mark."



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I once heard about a story that Fred Craddock told about an older man named Will Craddock told of how when he was a boy, his parents would make his siblings and him dress up every Saturday night. Neighbors would then sit in Craddock's living room to read the Bible and sing songs like "Bringing in the Sheaves" from old hymnals.

When Craddock asked his mother why they had to do this, she said, "We don't live close enough to a church actually to attend. But some day we might live close enough to a real church and so for now we're practicing."

One neighbor who came every week was a man named Will. Craddock once asked him, "Have you ever been in a real church?" "Hundreds," was Will's reply. "What's it like?" "Well, I'll tell you," Will answered. "First off, don't go by appearances. 'Cuz sometimes you'll see some little old white clapboard church up on cinderblocks out in the middle of nowhere and maybe the shutters are sagging a bit and all. But don't go by that. Because sometimes God disguises his goodness — he hides his best stuff in little old no-account places like that. But you just go inside one of those and you'll see."

"See what?" Fred pressed him. "Well, when you look up at the ceiling, you'll see it's a deep, deep blue. And the stars shine and the angels sing and . . . well, you'll just have to see for yourself some day, young man!"

Fred and his family attended Will's funeral in one of those little churches God had cleverly "disguised." But when Fred got inside, he was disappointed. It was nothing like what Will had promised. The paint was peeling. No stars shone. No angels on display.

But then, remembers Craddock, the worship service started. The choir began singing and swaying. The congregation joined in and all of a sudden, somewhere in the middle of all that singing and swaying, Fred looked up. "And the ceiling was blue. And the stars were shining. And ministries of angels sang Will to his rest."

- http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-28b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel Doug Bratt