

In Jesus' name. Amen.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "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, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. ... Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

And He told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ... 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.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What is our Lord's desire in telling us about **the signs... of what is coming on the world.**

He tells us at the end of this pericope: so that you may "**stand before the Son of Man.**"

What He means there is that you on that day of Judgment

are able to stand before Him in confident peace and joy,

unafraid of eternal condemnation because you have His own righteousness.

This is in stark contrast to those who will **faint with fear and foreboding** at Jesus' coming

because they do not have His righteousness and so face eternal condemnation.

Even in His parable, Jesus would give you hope and certainty when surrounded by fear and despair.

He speaks of the yearly transition, when we go from "the dead of winter" to the vibrancy of spring.

In fall and winter the deciduous trees shed their leaves and nature looks dead

(except here in the PNW when the grass gets green,

— but the dreariness of the constant drizzle acts much the same way).

Yet, out of that appearance of "death," life is flowing within the trees.

So, too, when **the signs in sun and moon and stars, and seas and waves** come,

while it looks like a lot of death, these are the signs of a vibrant eternal life on its way.

...

Growing up back in the Midwest, we would get ready to hunker down for the cold winter.

Of course, we would have the festive preparations in Nov. and Dec. to lighten things up,

but after that, for many a "cabin fever" often set in

(a lack of energy brought about by the weariness of sameness).

With the short, dark days and the isolation of confinement to your warm shelter, life seems rather bleak.

That "cabin fever" or weariness could be ascribed to a sense of hopelessness,

when one day is so much like the last there just doesn't seem to be much to live for.

In speaking with one of my friends, a professor at Bethany Lutheran College, about the effects

that the COVID shut-downs and mandates have had on his teaching and on the students,

something he said really hit home.

He mentioned how various cancelations of much anticipated events really had a demoralizing effect.

(Now, I am guessing that this is nothing new to you. You lived through it, too.)
But for many of our young people who were looking forward to their 8th grade waterpark trip,
or their senior homecoming, or the recruiters in the bleachers, or their solo musical performance,
or their first interview for their dream job...
to have such things cancelled,
or done but virtually, like everything else in the isolation of their own room...
and then that the same situation would be true the next year,
and then to not have the certainty that things will be “normal” next time or even next year...
All this has the affect of catechizing us in hopelessness: teaching and training us not to hope.

This is something worth pondering.

How dangerous is this pandemic of hopelessness? Brought about by a pandemic of fear.

How dangerous is it for Christians to be catechized in hopelessness?

To be learning (falsely) that our earthly joys and experiences are a reflection of our eternal realities.

To be trained into a spirit of apathy and distress when this world does what this sinful world does.

And this is what our Savior warns us to watch out for when He says, **watch yourselves
lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation** (over-indulgence)
and drunkenness and cares of this life.

Jesus' warning is that we not get so caught up in trying to find our hope in the things of this world,
that we lose focus on the joys that will last through this world and into the world to come.

If your hope is focused on the ease and good of this life,

then it is easy for the devil to bring you down in hopelessness.

And so, Jesus would teach and train you to recognize the signs of the end and what they mean for you.

He doesn't promise you ease and comfort in the latter day, but actually the opposite.

Even before the **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,

He compares the end of the world to Noah's days, the end of Sodom and Gomorrah,
and the destruction of Jerusalem.

In all these cases, sin was having its way among the people and there was great suffering,
not just for the righteous believers, but also among those in unbelief.

So we are not to learn to find our hope in the things of this world.

This worldly hope is what leads to **dissipation** (over-indulgence) - seeking hope in fleeting pleasure.

This worldly hope is what leads to **drunkenness** as you try to self-medicate to forget the pains.

This worldly hope is what leads to focusing your attention on the **cares of this life,**
so that your spiritual and eternal life aren't your primary care and concern.

And in each of these, we see where our attention is diverted by how we live.

What consumes our late night worries. What we spend our money on.

What we watch, or read, or listen to constantly. What we do when our family is together.

Where we go with our family.

And perhaps, just as telling, what we don't worry about, or spend our money on,
or do with our family.

But as I said, even by the parable, Jesus would give you hope and certainty
when surrounded by fear and despair.

The parable spoke of the budding and leafing of the trees after being dormant for the winter.

When you see that, it gives you hope for the spring and summer to come.

So to, when this world's hopes and joys come crashing down,

when society is turning in on itself to its own hurt and ruin,

then recognize that the time for Jesus' return is imminent and your temporal hopes will pass away
while your eternal hopes will be fully realized.

So Jesus would catechize you to hope and joy in the face of the sadness of this world.

He would teach you to look beyond the simple experiences of your senses,

what you see and hear and feel, and instead look to and focus on His Word which will not pass away.

Consider another dead tree, the one upon which Jesus hung.

If Jesus were to have trusted only His senses and ignored His Father's Word,

all hope of your salvation would have been lost as His hope gave way to fear and despair.

Yet Jesus knew the signs. He knew the Father's Word and what was to happen to Him.

Jesus was well-catechized to trust the Father's promises regardless of His senses,

and so, by His righteous, faithful life, and His innocent death, redemption has been earned for you.

Your sinful worldly hopes, fears, your anxiety, your despair have all been paid for,
and washed away in Jesus' blood.

And so life has come from that dead tree and has given hope to millions,

to those suffering through Christian persecution, to those suffering from plagues and famines,

to those cut off from family and friends, to those going through the heat of battle,

and to those struggling through the "cabin fever" of this life.

That life is given to you through the fruit of that tree as you stand or kneel before Him at His altar

and their receive His body and blood for forgiveness of your sins

and strength to hope in the face of fear, to lift up your head at your redemption and

to stand before your righteous and merciful judge.

There is hope in this world, even if not for this world which is passing away.

When Christ returns, the world will be destroyed, along with the sun, moon, and stars.

But Christ will take up all those who are His, all those who believe in Him,

and will give them the full realization of their hope.

You will be raised up to Him with a glorified body, never to suffer or hurt.

And He will give you and all believers the inheritance of a new and perfect heaven and earth,

where roaring seas and waves will never cause you fear.

You will be in God's eternal and blessed presence forever, never to be separated from Him again,
not by the effects of sin, or death.

And so, He will give you the strength to stand eternally before Him in peace and joy.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. **Amen**

Soli Deo Gloria