

## In Nomine Iesu

### The Second Sunday in Advent 2023 Worthy to stand before the Son of Man - Luke 21:25-36

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

When speaking about the last day, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ's visible return to earth, the Holy Scriptures use several different illustrations. In one His return is compared to lightning as it flashes across the sky, in another to a thief in the night. Today's Gospel lesson illustrates the last day in still another way. It will come as a snare upon all who are on the face of the earth. Those who don't believe in Christ will be caught in it, struggling in fearful surprise to escape where there is no escape. But we who believe are not to be surprised nor filled with fear. Instead, we are to watch and pray that we are **counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man**

#### I

The coming of the last day will be received very differently by the peoples of the earth. For some their hearts will fail “them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth.” (v. 26) But St. Luke says to those who trust in the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus, “Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” (v. 28) As Christians we look forward to the last day with confidence, because we know that our salvation is already certain. Christ, our Lord, has gone before us to prepare a place for us, and says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:3) The unbeliever not only does not look forward to the Last Day, he or she doesn't even want to believe there will be a day of reckoning. That is why that Day will come upon him unexpectedly.

Now we Christians may be tempted to think that the warnings given us are so self-evident that the dangers of which they speak are easily avoided. But consider what Jesus says. Remember the illustration He is using. We are to take heed to ourselves

lest the Last Day come upon us as a snare. What is a snare? How does it work? Or perhaps we should ask: What makes it possible to trap animals in the first place? I'm no expert, but I know it is usually done in one of two ways. A trap is when food is placed as bait, but a snare is set in a place the animal frequents in the course of its regular routine. In the first case the animal is trapped because it is foolish enough to believe that something good and helpful just miraculously appeared in front of it for its benefit without having to get it with effort. But when is life ever like that? Such are those Jesus describes as drunk and carousing.

In the second case the animal is trapped because it is so busy taking care of all the mundane matters of life that it walks into a danger that is literally right in front of it. It follows the same path, the same routine, it has always followed. But one day the snare appears without warning, as if from nowhere. Such are those described as being weighed down with the cares of life. In both cases, whether an animal trapped by foolishness or shortsightedness, the Day of Judgment comes upon that person who pays no heed to the warnings our gracious God, who desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, has been giving through His church and its ministry of grace.

In an earlier chapter St. Luke spoke of the last day, he compared it to the days of Noah and of Lot. He writes, "They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:27-29) In other words, life went on normally right to the end. Only when it was too late, did the realization strike people that their day of reckoning had come. Only when the snare closed around them because of their own shortsightedness did their hearts fail them from fear of what was coming. So too will be the Last Day.

This warning is most certainly given to Christians, because we too can be foolish in the course of our lives. We are frequently weighed down with the cares and worries of life, just like our neighbors. For this reason we must be reminded - frequently - to watch, to pray, to be ready. In His great love God would open the eyes of our faith to look beyond mere life here and now to life eternal - to look beyond the physical present to the full reality of life. He who gave His own Son desires that we would escape all these things that will come to pass.

## II

How can we avoid the dangers which fill the course of our lives and so threaten our eternal well-being? Will we be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man?

The answer is not complicated. God's word tells us in plain and simple terms. His standard of worthiness is perfection. "Be therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) The only one who has been perfect is Christ, who was without sin. But it is just this righteousness – the perfect righteousness of Christ - that God not only demands from us, but **actually gives to us**, freely, in the gospel. That is why St. Paul rejoiced, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to

faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17) For the sake of Christ’s bitter suffering and death, God Himself freely and fully forgives us of all our sins. What is more, for the sake of His perfect life, He clothes us with Christ’s own perfect righteousness. Possessed of these we will indeed be counted worthy to stand on the last stand, to stand before Him who saved us.

The last day will come as a snare - suddenly. It will catch unprepared those who go through life heedless of God’s word and, so, clothed in their own unrighteousness, their own unworthiness, completely unable to stand before God on Judgement Day. But it will come swiftly also for those who trust Christ for mercy, for forgiveness, for their only righteousness. Indeed, it will. But for us who believe it will be not as a snare, but as a lifeline lowered out of heaven to rescue us from “the sea and the roaring waves.” We won’t look feverishly about in panic as the foundations of the earth are shaken, for our confidence has always been in the unchanging word of our gracious God. When these things begin to happen, [let us] look up and lift up our heads, because our redemption draws near. This our Lord tells us in advance, so we will not be caught unprepared. Dear friends, in baptism you were clothed in Christ’s own righteousness and made worthy to stand before Him; in the absolution, which you hear every week, your baptismal robe of righteousness is again made spotless as the day God first clothed you in it, in regularly hearing the preached gospel your eyes are lifted from earthly paths to the ways of God and so you are led safely past the snares along life’s path; in receiving Christ’s body and blood you are not caught in a killing trap but embraced with the nail-pierced hands of Him who carried the weight of your sins to judgment at Calvary, and there, satisfied God’s just wrath toward all your sin, rising from death on Easter morning to guarantee that it is true.

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As we day by day draw nearer and nearer to Christmas, and the celebration once more of the birth of our Savior, we see more clearly the nature of the gift God, who so loved the world, gave to all on Christmas morning. He gave to us His own Son, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, so that we could be wrapped in His righteousness and stand before Him without fear on the Last Day. Let us rejoice in Him whose righteousness is given us so freely and fully week after week, Sunday after Sunday. It is the gift that makes us worthy to stand before Him. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**