

SERMON FOR SUN. NOV. 14, 2021

Pent 25B Daniel 12:1-3 Mark 13:1-13 “Birth Pains.”

Dear fellow redeemed of Christ, during the last few weeks of the Church Year, our attention is drawn to the End Times – the fact that this world and life is not going to last forever but will end.

Exactly when Jesus will return, we do not know. Perhaps sooner than we'd expect, maybe later than we'd expect.

But most people, are *hoping* for later! Why? Because by the descriptions that the Bible gives us of what those end times will be like, you really don't want to be around when they happen!

We heard from the prophet Daniel that before Messiah's return, **“there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been.”** It's not going to be pleasant, and it's not going to be easy. But, then again, you already know that!

This life is already hard. It's not easy when you or a loved one faces disease and uncertainty about the future.

It's not easy when you see disasters on TV wiping out cities and towns. It's not easy when people around us die.

It's not easy when people cheat, lie, hurt, or ridicule us.

It's not easy when we see so many turning away from the Christian faith to false gods that cannot save them.

This life's already tough! The physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. The pain, doubts, and grief.

And, according to Jesus, it's going to get worse.

It will get worse, first of all, because **Satan** knows that as we draw closer to the end, his days are numbered. Like a wild animal backed into a corner, he is going to fight harder and more ferociously than ever

– increasing his attacks against Christians, increasing his lies and temptations, doing everything in his power to destroy faith in Jesus. And you can see it happening in our world today.

And it is going to get worse, secondly, because of **sin** – that makes us hurt each other. The sin that makes us selfish.

The sin that convinces us to trust in ourselves or the things of this world for the answers to our problems; to trust in governments, courts, laws, and politicians; to trust in the goodness that we think is deep down in every person.

But these idols of our own making are spawning most of the problems we see today, and rather than making this world a better place; in fact, they are doing the opposite.

And there's a third reason conditions on earth are going to deteriorate, ***and this one may surprise you.***

It's going to get worse because of **God's "divine shaking."** According to scripture, our Heavenly Father is going to **"[remove] the things that can be shaken – that is, the things that have been made – in order that what cannot be shaken may remain."**

And so He is going to shake our false idols to show us how untrustworthy these things actually are.

And so, has your life been shaken? Good! Stop trusting in yourself and your own efforts to obtain salvation!

Were you disappointed in the election results last year? Good! Be a good citizen and vote, but stop putting your trust in the government to solve our problems.

Do the things you see on the news shake you? The wars, natural disasters, the rise of radical Islam, the continuing disregard for the sanctity of human life? Good!

Thank God that He loves us enough to shake us up. To take away our idols so that we trust only in Him. And know it's only going to get worse, for the time is running short.

But amid all these troubles, Jesus says, do not be afraid because these are **"just the beginning of the birth pains."**

And that picture gives us quite a different perspective on all of this. While it acknowledges the troubles and the pain, the working of Satan and sin, the groaning and the convulsions of creation – Jesus tells us to see these things not as troubling things but as hopeful signs.

All this turmoil is only the beginning of ***the contractions of the new creation.***

As you know, the nearer a woman comes to giving birth, the contractions get harder and closer together because that's what happens when the time is short; when the delivery is near.

Yet I'm told that the pain of birth is surpassed only by the intensity of joy when a child is born. When a mother holds her baby, all the pain of childbirth is turned into gladness. Only a God of love, joy, and life can take pain and turn it into joy.

Though Jesus' words to his disciples hold the prospect of immediate pain, they also point to confidence that God doesn't leave us there. God doesn't abandon us.

And so these last days are not a time of fear for the Christian, but in fact, a time of joy and hope! For like a woman in labor, we know the pains are not an end in and of themselves, but the heralds of, and the means to, new life.

These troubles are God's way of killing the old, sinful man or women in us, that clings to the things of this world and that trusts in our own abilities – so that we may repent, cling only to Christ, and trust only in what Jesus did for us when **the days were accomplished for Him to be delivered.**

The reason the Son of God was born in human flesh, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger, was to provide the way to the new creation.

By His death and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over our sins, death, and the devil. We who've been united to Him by grace through faith, share in His victory, and His life our life.

And His life is the life of the new creation, the new birth of water and the Spirit where we are delivered and born again.

In Baptism, you've been given new life already. You've been forgiven, washed clean, and snatched from Satan grasp.

Christ's victory is ours already though you have not yet delivered from the pain and death of this world.

That day *is* coming, though. For some of us sooner, for some of us later. Until it does, we may not look very much like a new creation as individuals, as a congregation, or as a Church.

And while it may look like we, our congregation, our Church, and our world is suffering through violent *death throes*, the cross tells us a wonderful, comforting truth: that in our Savior, in Christ Jesus, ***death throes have been transformed into birth pains!***

For all who are joined to Christ, death and the end of this world are now simply the gates to the joys of Heaven, which will never end.

And so just as you have already been given this new life now in Baptism, so too the joy of Heaven is yours already now.

Joy in the face of suffering and pain, yes – but also joy in the presence of your Savior, as He comes to you even now.

He comes with His forgiveness, life, and salvation here – forgiving our sins in Holy Absolution, giving new life in Baptism, and feeding our faith and

strengthening us in His salvation with His body and blood in Holy Communion.

And with these means sustaining us, we ***endure to the end*** – not because of our power, reason, or strength, but because of Him.

Because He is **the author and perfecter of our faith.**

Because He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion.

Because He has given us a kingdom that cannot be shaken for Himself is the cornerstone!

“Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”

And what else is acceptable worship but to be drawn to Him who gives such gifts to men with contrite hearts, confessing our sin, and receiving the blessings He here gives us.

The gifts of faith. The gifts of new life. The gifts of Heaven.

The gifts that are here for you, for your God knows what you are going through! For Jesus experienced all the troubles common to humanity, and so He knows exactly what we need.

Please note, that these birth pains, as bad as things may seem, are not out of God’s control.

There is a good and Godly purpose for all these troubles– **that the Gospel might be proclaimed to [you and me and] all nations.**

You see, many folks will not listen when times are good and things are easy. God can only get their attention when things get shaken. And so God will shake, not to show his power over creations, but that all who believe in His Son Jesus may be saved. For that is the good and gracious will of God.

So as we see all manner of disturbing things happening around us – buildings tumbling, nations grumbling, and sinners bumbling; remember that as governments rise and fall, and persecutions increase, that we would not fear but turn to Him.

That we fear not but *rejoice*! That we fear not but know that the new life and the new creation are at hand! AMEN

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.