

Sermon Nov 14, 2021
Redeemer, Ramsey
Pastor M Linderman

Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Talk of the end of the World—the coming of the Apocalypse
You would be easily forgiven for thinking that it really is upon us.

We have Jesus' words in the Gospel lesson today, and these words are 2000 years old!
“Wars and rumors of wars; great suffering on the part of many people;
Nation will rise against nation; kingdoms against kingdoms; and natural disasters; earthquakes
and famines!”

Our world is a topsy turvy mess of conflicts and incredible systemic problems; economic
injustice, political oppression; social unrest; climate change. We all see problems ballooning
around us, and our anxiety ballooning within us, in our minds. We regularly come to expect the
worst these days.

But we are not the first generation of Christians to live with this kind of stress and
apprehension about the future. In the past, realities like this in the lives of God's faithful people
lead to the creation and appreciation of Apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a genre
of biblical literature that speaks hope to people who live in times of great persecution and
upheaval.

The Book of Daniel is one of the best examples of this literature; written somewhere between
167 and 164 BCE, it describes the rise and fall of several world empires, and looks forward to
the fall of the current empire that controls Jerusalem. This was the Selucid empire ruled by King
Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus' plan to control Palestine was to encourage Hellenism, or
Greek-influenced culture and bureaucracy over traditional Jewish culture. He was angered by
traditionalist Jews in Palestine and their rejection of his pick for a Jewish High Priest that
supported Hellenism. He So he sacked Jerusalem and put an altar to Zeus in the Jewish Temple,
and placed a pig's carcass on the altar in the sanctum of the temple. This was incredibly
offensive to traditionalist Jews, and signaled their persecution under his rule. It was a period of
incredible upheaval and persecution for the Jewish people.

About 230 years later, the Gospel of Mark was also written in the face of great upheaval in
Jerusalem; for Jesus' prediction of the fall of the Temple in this little apocalypse in Mark 13, “all
these stones will be thrown down”, does come true, in AD 70, when the Romans, who are the
new occupying government, respond to a Jewish rebellion in 66 AD. The Roman army laid siege
to the city, and tore down the temple. Since that day, there has never been another temple for
the Jewish nation.

As if that wasn't enough political and religious turmoil for you, we have the strains of faithful resistance and hope in the 1st hymn today and the hymn of the day after this sermon is over.

In our first hymn: "Built on a Rock"
Built on the Rock, the church shall stand
even when steeples are falling;
Christ builds His church in ev'ry land;
bells still are chiming and calling,
calling the young and old to rest,
calling the souls of those distressed,
longing for life everlasting.
That's not a cheerful way to start a hymn

That's not a very cheerful way to start a hymn.

In the second hymn:
Through the night of doubt and sorrow
onward goes the pilgrim band,
singing songs of expectation,
marching to the promised land.
Clear before us through the darkness
gleams and burns the guiding light;
pilgrim clasps the hand of pilgrim,
stepping fearless through the night.

What is going on here? Why all this talk of nighttime, and challenge, and steeples falling and pilgrims struggling to keep to their path?

Well, both hymn writers, Nikolai Gruntvig and Bernhardt Ingemann both lived through the political turmoil of the 1830's and 1840's in Europe. It was the time of the birth pangs of many new nation states. In 1848, the year of the most upheaval in Europe, Grundtvig would have been 65, and Ingemann 59. In that year, several political revolutions rocked the nations of Europe. Largely it was 'liberal' political movements rebelling against older monarchical systems. Power to the people, to be taken away from monarchs and traditional aristocracies. It has been called the Springtime of the Peoples, or Springtime of the Nations.

In 1848 alone, revolutions took place in the Italian states, France, the German states, Denmark, Schleswig, the Habsburg Monarchy, Hungary, Galicia, Sweden, Switzerland, Greater Poland, Romanian Principalities, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Other European states, Other English-speaking countries, and Latin America. The whole world seemed to be rising up in revolution.

In the midst of such a torrent of political change, the hymn writers of our hymns for today remind Christians that we are pilgrims marching toward a heavenly goal. Think of all the division in the church in Europe at the time, with some members supporting the old ways, and

some supporting the new revolutions. Think of the pastors, some for the old, some for the new. But the lesson of the church through its long history is that although nation may rise against nation, and people against people, but the church still goes on, through the nighttime of peril and change, and travels peacefully toward the dawn of God's eternal kingdom.

With all of this in the background, we today are called on to hear Christ's promise to the church, that even if one comes claiming to be Christ himself, this is not the end, but merely the birth pangs of the end. In the meantime, we the church, those who put their trust in Christ's presence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, cling not to the promises of the leaders of nations, but cling to the promises of God.

Don't get me wrong, we are called to participate in the world, not to run from it. God expects us to support and call for good government, fairness, equality and justice for all. But we look to God for salvation, the lifting of the burden of our sin, and the rescue from the power and grip of death. It is Easter which was the beginning of the final revolution which we have seen and tasted, and to which we strive in our lives of faith.

Thus, in the word of St. Paul in the second lesson today: "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

God is gracious, and faithful. The church will not fail, because God, whose promises we live by, will not fail.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.