

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost/November 18, 2018
Mark 13:1-13/Enduring to the End
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“... endures to the end will be saved”

Sooner or later, every programmer encounters Murphy's Law, “If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong at the worst possible time in the worst possible way.” The fact is sooner or later everything in this world wears out and fails. No matter what I try, users or hardware will fail at some point.

Murphy's Law doesn't just affect software engineers. Ever notice when you drop a sandwich, it lands with the insides on the carpet? Notice if you get in the shortest line at the store, the person in front needs a price check? How about traffic is usually most congested when you are late? Murphy's Law is one expression of the decay and frustration that entered this world when Adam and Eve sinned.

Sin corrupted this world and it's been slowly coming to an end ever since; slowly wearing out and a time will come when God will bring it to an end. He will purify it and bring a new, pure, and perfect world into existence. The world we see will cease to exist and a new one will take its place. It is tradition for the church to think about this as we approach the end of another church year. The readings for this week and next tell us something about the end of this world.

Today's gospel begins as Jesus left the temple for the last time on Holy Tuesday, the Tuesday before Good Friday. It is when one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” The buildings impressed this disciple.

It is easy for us to forget all things must come to an end. The

pyramids have been around for thousands of years. Not much changes during our relatively short time here on this earth. We come to think some things are permanent. We are tempted to think what is will continue. The disciple wondered how something as magnificent as the temple could ever come to a bad end.

Jesus reminded the disciple and us too all things come to an end. Jesus said, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Jesus agreed the buildings were great, but He also warned they would not last. As beautiful and imposing as they were, they would not last to the end of the century. In the year 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem including the Temple. Today, a Moslem shrine, the Dome of the Rock, now stands there.

Jesus not only warned against trusting in the physical things of this world, but also in the social and spiritual institutions of this world. Later, as He sat on the Mount of Olives and looked across the valley at the temple, He warned His followers then and now what to expect as the world wears down to its final moment.

Jesus talked about the spiritual decay of the world. Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.” He warned some people will even claim to be the returning Christ.

We have plenty of would be Messiahs, Jim Jones claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and led hundreds in a ritual suicide; remember David Koresh of the Branch Davidians he claimed to be the Messiah too.

Fringe cults and sects seem to have enough false christs to go around, but these cults and sects aren't the only fulfillments of Christ's

prophecy. Even churches that claim to be part of main line Christianity lead people astray. Ebenezer Lutheran Church of San Francisco, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, openly prays to a Goddess. Their version of the Lord's Prayer begins with these words: "Our Mother who is within us we celebrate your many names. Your wisdom come. Your will be done, unfolding from the depths within us." [<http://www.herchurch.org/>] The United Church of Christ no longer requires their clergy to confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The tendency for even main line denominations to abandon the Word of God demonstrates the spiritual decay Jesus spoke about in today's Gospel.

Jesus also talked about the social decay of the world. Many of the catastrophes He described are manmade; wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Even family members will turn against one another; brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. A simple review of the news headlines tells us these social breakdowns are already happening.

The interesting thing about all these warnings is they all happened and continue to happen. All the warnings in today's Gospel already happened during the lifetime of the Apostles. Wars, famines, spiritual unfaithfulness, and family breakdowns are part of the world scene today. Many don't even think these are warnings because they have never known a world without them. Since these prophecies have all come true, the stage is set for the end of the world and has been for some time.

If all things come to an end, if we can't take it with us when we die and it will all dissolve on the last day, why do we give the things of this world such a high priority? Why do we focus on the buildings and stones of this world? Why do we rely on things that cannot last?

There is another way. Jesus said, “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” There is a salvation that lasts beyond the end of this world and into the next; as a matter of fact, it lasts forever.

Today’s Gospel began with the temporary stones of the temple. Those stones cannot save, but there is a stone that saves. The Psalmist said, [Ps 118:22-23] “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

The Temple authorities rejected this Stone with extreme prejudice. They arrested and arranged to have this Stone beaten and crucified. As He hung on the cross, it looked like His end was near. As He died on the cross, it looked like His end had come. As His cold body lay in the tomb, it looked like His end had passed.

His suffering and death was an end, but it was not His end. It was the end of our slavery to sin. It was the end of the condemnation and guilt our sin earns. It was the end of death’s reign in this world. For on the Sunday, after He was laid in the tomb, He rose from the dead. He rose to live forever; the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This stone, of course, is Jesus Christ Himself, the Rock of Ages. You who believe in Him, believe in the only Stone that lasts forever. You believe in the living stone who is the foundation of the New Heavens and the New Earth. The one who endures to the end is the one whose faith in Jesus Christ endures. You who believe Jesus Christ is your only savior from sin is one who endures to the end and will be saved.

All things on this earth come to an end. Today’s Gospel talks of the beautiful buildings of the temple, replaced by a Moslem mosque.

There will be a time when that mosque will also be gone. Eventually, even the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars will go away. Only Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages will remain. Those who followed the false prophets of this world will remain without salvation. You who endured in the one true faith will be saved. Deo Gratias! Thanks be to God!