

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – 2021

Daniel 12:1-3

Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-13

Prognosticators, peril, and permanence; God wills you to see the three “Ps” this morning. I’m a big believer in reading, writing and ’rithmetic – the three Rs. That kind of focused discipline served education quite well for a long time. What I’ve harvested from our readings this morning is not nearly so catchy, and it certainly won’t become a slogan but it is as real as a head of lettuce or the shoes on your feet. Prognosticators, peril, and permanence – commit it to memory.

Y’all know what a prognosticator is – in fact, you are one yourself. Not only that, you’re pretty good at it. Everyone here is an expert at predicting something or another. Wives are typically experts on their husbands, being able to predict behavior based on prior experience, based on special insight into hubby’s frame of mind. A prognosticator is one who can, hopefully accurately, predict or foretell a future event. The sun hasn’t come up tomorrow but most of you can properly prophesy on which horizon the sun will rise. A wife knows that after a two-hour commute on a Friday evening that hubby may not be in a sterling mood when he arrives home.

Jesus expects a lot of you. He expects you to use your head. Jesus expects you to pay attention. Pay attention to His Word, pay attention to the world around you, pay attention and prepare; pay attention, put two and two together and prognosticate. He knows that you’re good at it. Folks in Oklahoma know what a green sky means; they’re prognosticators. We know that a Santa Ana wind in July here in So. California is going to bring a blistering heat; we’re prognosticators. Where I grew up in Oregon, in the Willamette Valley, winter meant a lot of rain. Everyone knew it was coming. Do you know what’s coming? The Day is coming. The Last Day, the return of Christ, the end of this creation, the culmination of all things.

There is a time for everything. So says the poetry in Ecclesiastes. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time for war and a time for peace. There was a time to create, to begin, a time for God to breathe the breath of life into the first man. There will be a time to conclude this creation. There was a time for God to be conceived, a time, in Bethlehem, for the Lord to be born, a time for Him to enter Jerusalem. When He did, some were oblivious to what was happening around them. I get the sense that Jesus holds them responsible for their obliviousness. He said this: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret this present time?” (Luke 12:56).

This world is going to end and you are to be prepared. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, mere days before His death on the holy cross, He wept over the city. He knew what was coming. In 70AD, Rome sacked Jerusalem and it was an unqualified catastrophe. On that Palm Sunday, Jesus said this: “For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because **you did not know the time of your visitation**” (Luke 19:43). The people of Jerusalem ignored God’s gracious visit in His Son. They ignored it or they misunderstood it.

Either way, Jesus holds them responsible. What do you think of that? Can you prognosticate our times? Do you believe the Day is drawing near? Is now a time to be closer or further away from Christ and His church?

Prognosticators, peril, and permanence; the peril is around you. In the Garden of Eden, the peril was being led astray. One of our great hymns says this about the devil: “on earth is not his equal.” Vain philosophy is your enemy and your enemy is presently ubiquitous – means that it’s everywhere. The pandemic has loosed a rabid dog of vain philosophy and the devil is grinning. Where are you safe? From peril, I mean. Where are you safe? When the tornado blows, you want a house under the hill. When the wild fire rages, you want a house surrounded by water. When the earthquake hits, you want to be standing someplace stable. Okay, where is it safe? Where are you spiritually safe? From death, from heresy, from fear and sin and devil and an unbelieving world that wants desperately to convert you to evolution or hedonism or materialism or narcissism or postmodernism or saftyism or anything but where you are now. Where are you safe from peril?

One thing that I’ve learned as a pastor after 25 years is that people are not as stable as they appear. Life is chaotic. We want to appear stable, but we aren’t. Some time ago, a friend was offered a job at company headquarters – promotion, raise, a real ego massage. He told me that he wasn’t going to take it. He said that God told him not to go, not to take the job. God has never told me anything outside of what I read in the Bible so I don’t put a lot of stock in those stories but I don’t discount that it happens. The week after that, he told me that his plans had changed. Oh, why’s that, I asked? They made me an offer that I couldn’t refuse. Hmm. How many of us are guilty of that kind of change of allegiance? All of us. Who here is actively building their house on the sand? Who here wants the house of their soul to be on the rock when the Last Day arrives? Where are we safe from peril?

There is only one thing permanent in this life. Prognosticators, peril and permanence; On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. The disciples gave voice to the awe they felt as they saw the Temple. Don’t look there, Christ said. One greater than the Temple is here. Jesus and His empty tomb is the only thing that can’t be shaken. Permanence is found in His crucified flesh. Christ and His holy cross is where permanence is located. Nothing will last that is not of Him. Jesus is the prognosticator par excellence. He saw His death, He saw His resurrection, He saw the NT age of the church and all that will befall us in this world. “Be on your guard,” He said (Mark 13:9). But there is no panic in Christ. Wars and rumors of wars, birth pains – the end does not alarm Him, our chaos does not alarm Him. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing! Not tribulation, nor distress, not persecution, not famine nor nakedness or danger or sword (Romans 8:35). Our Good Shepherd is firm, unwavering. He looks each believer in the eye and says: “My Father, who has given you to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch you out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:29).

My mother-in-law painted the picture on the cover of the bulletin. There is a Narnia-like quality to this painting. I love it. Our focal point – it is meant to convey permanence. Christ the King – this is His church. His church is of His making. We are safe from peril in Christ’s church. We are safe from peril where the Gospel is preached. No one leads you astray in this place. Here the

living voice is Christ penetrates your soul, confidence swells in your heart and you know – you are loved of God. He gave His Son into death, bearing your sin, and Jesus took it away. We will not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. We are going to encourage each other, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near. We encourage each other with a shared faith, born of the Holy Spirit. We encourage each other with love when one of us faces difficulty. We pray together, encouraging one another with Christ's own words. The risen King is here; to give, to bless and to sustain. There is no peril that He has not resolved. He faced it. He triumphed over it. He gives you that victory as a gift in this place. Permanence, real and heavenly, is found in Him. He is the One who endures to the end and we are in Him.