

Promises and Fulfillment

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

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Nov. 22, 2015

Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near, and my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they that dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. Isaiah 51:4-6

Some Lutherans call this Sunday, known as the Last Sunday of the Church Year, "Christ the King" Sunday. Some simply call it "Fulfillment". But you can really use both of these titles. As Christ the King is the fulfillment of temporal human history, so also is he the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

As I went to prepare this message, I came across something that I just had to include today. Do you know that 52 years ago today, Nov. 22, John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States, was assassinated? Many of you in this room can probably remember where you were and what you were doing on that cold, winter-like day. I know I can. I was in my room in Johnson Hall at Kent State University and was dazed. I had a hard time believing that such a thing could have happened to the President of the United States.

It was a happening that shook the country and shook the world. Books have been written, tens of thousands of words have been said, and there has been more than one investigation by congressional committees, but for some major questions still linger. It certainly was a major event in the history of the world.

Our texts today, however, tell us of an event that is far, far greater. Pastor Dan Esala referred to it last week when he made a brief reference to the "Day of the Lord", pointing out you should spell the word "Day" with a capital "D" because of its importance. He discussed the signs of the last days. Some of you that were here may have been a little surprised to hear that we believe that we have been in the "last days" for some time. Most of his discussion was centered around Mark 13 1-13. He told you that our understanding of the last days is called "amillennial". Simply put, we believe that Jesus is only going to return with his angels one time, and that will be at the end of the world. We don't accept the teaching that he will rule for 1,000 years on earth before the "Second Coming" or after it.

Now our Gospel for today follows closely after last week's Gospel and describes events that only make sense if we understand them to be that great "Day" of the Lord's Second Coming. Mark 24 tells us, "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. And they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and collect his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." (verses 24-27)

Pastor Dan also told you about one group of about 200,000 who sold their property and were standing by waiting for the world to end. There have been other such groups in the history of the world, and every once in a while something pops up on the internet or in the paper on how someone has figured out when the world's going to end. Don't waste your time listening to any of these people. Jesus is quoted in verse 32 as saying, "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, only the Father." We are told to be on guard, to be alert to what is going on around us. We are reminded that the Lord has left us in charge and we have work to do!

Now there is prophecy for God's people in the New Testament and there was prophecy and fulfillment for people in the Old Testament. Our Old Testament reading is from God's prophet Isaiah. He is often thought of as the greatest of the writing prophets. He was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Micah, and began his ministry about 740 years before Christ. He often referred to God as "the Holy One of Israel". According to Jewish tradition, he was sawed in two during the reign of Manasseh. We can't prove that from the Holy Scriptures, but there is a reference to a prophet being sawed in two in Hebrews 11.

What God said through his prophet Isaiah could pretty well be said to God's people today, as nation after nation drifts away from God's Law and false religions spread and enemies such as ISIS surround us. God says, "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my judgment for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples..."

Isaiah wrote this account during the expansion of another murdering group, the Assyrians, and the decline of Israel because of its sin. The northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians and Judah later fell into captivity by the Babylonians. So God did not rescue his people during that time of history, did he? But he did preserve them in part. Why? Because God had promised to their ancestor Abraham that through Abraham all of the nations of the world would be blessed. He had a purpose in saving them.

So the skeptics and the unbelievers sit back and they point to Biblical history and they point to about 100,000 Christians who have been martyred over the past year (that's what Pastor Dan told us last week) and many more that have been displaced from their homes, and they ask, "Where is your God?"

So let's give them an answer today. He is in the same place he was when his prophets were killed. He is in the same place he was when eleven out of twelve disciples were martyred; he is in the same place he was when his Son was humiliated and died on the cross for our sins. He has a plan to deal with sin; he has provided salvation for us; and he will restore us to a future Eden in a far better place than this for eternity. That what we are to focus on; any other benefit we receive on this earth is fine but it's not guaranteed.

So in Isaiah 51 verse 6 he gives his people a glimpse of what is to come and he instructs them that his promises will still be standing and be in effect even when the ground that we are all standing on is gone. He states, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look to the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those in it will die in like manner; **but my salvation will be forever...**"

So if things get bad, just remember what we are to focus on. It's OK to mail your Christmas cards wishing "Peace on earth, good will to men." But the truth is that there has hardly ever been peace on earth except for about two hundred years of the Roman peace, and that was enforced by an army. There will be no final peace; there will be no justice or real joy, until the return of the Prince of Peace. "Lo! He comes with clouds descending, Once for every sinner slain; Thousand thousand saints attending, Swell the triumph of His train; Al-le-lu-jah, al-le-lu-jah, al-le-lu-jah! Christ the Lord returns to reign! (LSB 336-verse 1) Amen.