

Pentecost 26 11/18/18  
Mark 13:1-13 28B  
Life in the Midst of Birth Pains

## THESE ARE BUT THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH PAINS

The day is surely drawing near  
When Jesus, God's anointed,  
In all His power shall appear  
As judge whom God appointed {*LSB 508:1*}.

And prior to His coming, Jesus warns us that false teachers will arise to lead you astray. They will deny the work and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. They will look at the Bible and say it's a book of fairy tales and myths, that cannot be believed or trusted. They will say that all religions are the same; they all teach the same thing; that different religions are just different ladders to the same heaven.

Jesus also said that before His coming, there would be wars and rumors of wars. Afghanistan, Somali, Syria, Israel and Palestine – wars in all these places continue to rage, causing destruction, mayhem, death.

Jesus said there would be earthquakes. So far, in this calendar year alone, 2018, there have been 11,989 earthquakes. And no, it is not an earthquake, but Friday, the *Bismarck Tribune* reported that, in addition to the loss of property and livelihood and the emotional toll, the California wildfires have claimed 63 lives and 631 people are missing.

Famine? 124 million people, living in 51 different countries, are living in famine.

Jesus said that His followers would face persecution before He comes again. So far in 2018, – and I can tell you this because of a wonderful organization that keeps track of such numbers -- 3,066 Christians have been killed for being Christian; 1,252 have been abducted;

1,020 sexually abused or forced into marriage; and 73 churches have been attacked. All told, 1 in 12 Christians live where the Christian faith is illegal, forbidden, or punished. This is, of course, due in no small part to Islamic oppression, but I can also tell you that North Korea, for the 17<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, remains the # 1, the single, most dangerous country for Christians.

My Dear Friends in Christ, the signs are everywhere. If I didn't know any better, I would swear that maybe the end is upon us.

Which brings up a very important question: What exactly is Jesus referring to when He spoke of these signs in our text for today? Is He talking specifically about the Last Day, the day of the great Judgment? When you read the words of our Gospel (and the other parallel Gospel accounts) you find that Jesus is not speaking here about the Last Day and the Judgment. **He's not!** He's talking here about the terrible, sinful things that will happen in the days leading up to Judgment Day. He's talking here about "everyday life" as a Christian living in a fallen and sinful world. And you and I are all too aware of that, because we live it every day.

Jesus talks about false messiahs and preachers, wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes (and other natural disasters), as "birth pains". So, My Dear Friends in Christ, let me ask you a question: Do you sincerely think that we're the first generation to have to deal with these things? These birth pains have been going on since sin entered into the world; since our first parents were cast from the Garden; since the time Cain murdered his brother Abel in cold blood!

Look at the context in which our Lord Christ is speaking these words. He's talking to the disciples as they look at the wonder and magnificence and the **stability** of the temple buildings. Jesus tells them to not look to these earthly creations, made with human hands, for confidence or

security or hope. He tells them about wars, rumors of war, famines, earthquakes, and various persecutions and martyrdoms. Then, He goes in, in our reading for next Sunday, to tell them that not one single stone of that huge, beautiful temple will be left standing upon another, something which came to fulfillment in the year 70 A.D. when the Roman army completely sacked and destroyed Jerusalem after they tried to rebel.

The real question for us to consider is: Why? Why did Jesus tell His disciples such terrifying things? He was telling them these things so they wouldn't lose their faith when the going got tough. He was teaching faithfulness! He is giving them, and us, a good healthy dose of reality. "The one who endures to the end will be saved (v. 13)." Stay faithful. We press on toward the goal from the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, in the face of all the calamity and terror we've witnessed in the world, and in our lives (cf. Ph 3:14).

Our Epistle reading admonishes us, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (He 10:23)." Our hope is Jesus, for One who spoke these words about living life in the midst of birth pains, is the same Jesus who delivered us from all of it.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh and blood and dwelt among us on this earth. He lived a perfect life of obedience to all of God's Commandments for you. He took from you all of your sin, all your wrongdoing, all your worries about your daily bread, and all your fears about tomorrow, and carried it all to Calvary's cross, where He offered the single, all-sufficient offering for sin. He died. He was buried, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, He rose again and His resurrection is proof positive that your sins are forgiven. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours because you have been baptized and live in Christ Jesus. You live in that blessed hope that

Jesus will come again and deliver you from false preachers, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines. This is your hope. You walk by faith in that hope. And, this is what you hold fast to, even in the midst of things you cannot understand, especially not with your human reason and senses.

The truth is this: Earthly life is lived under the cross, and the cross is an instrument of death. Our Lord Christ said it this way, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (Jn 16:33)."  
Nothing has ever overtaken you except that which is common to all man. You have not been singled out. Look upon your brothers and sisters with sympathy. They are all hurting, *the same as you*. If it seems to you that they have it easy, you are wrong. No one has it easy. And please understand me, I don't mean that in a negative way; what I mean is that you just may not be aware of the crosses your neighbor bears. In the midst of all these birth pains, each of us is called to stay faithful, remember the coming Day of the Lord, and live in His grace. Comfort one another. Encourage one another. Love one another, just as you have been loved. Forgive one another, just as you have been so graciously and lovingly forgiven. Our Epistle reading today says it this way,

"Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (He 10:24-25). Jesus is doing His work in us.

In the midst of the lies of the devil, war, natural disasters, divorce, illness, and sorrow, burdened by guilt, shame, and regret, your Lord Christ continues to come to you as He has promised. You, Dear Child of God, are not alone. You have not only your fellow, suffering bond-servants; you have the Lord Jesus. He speaks His Words of forgiveness

and peace and comfort into your ears. He feeds you with His life-giving Body and Blood so that you will be strengthened for the times and trials to come; so that you will have joy and peace that surpasses all understanding while you wait **and** even while you suffer. For He is not simply your Lord in the future, when all sorrows shall cease, but He is also your loving and gracious and almighty Lord right now, even as you live life today in the midst of birth pains.