

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

November 16, 2025 (Proper 28C)
Luke 21:5-19
Malachi 4:1-2a

You might remember this one. A priest and a pastor from local churches stood by the side of the road, pounding a sign into the ground that read: "The End is Near...Turn Around Now...Before It's Too Late!!"

A car sped past them, and the driver yelled, "Leave us alone, you religious nuts!"

From around the curve, they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

The pastor turned to the priest and asked, "Do you think the sign should just say, 'Bridge Out'?"

Seriously though, have you seen the SIGNS? We can EASILY read our own current events into Jesus' words. Have you been following the news? The SIGNS are THERE. Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and plagues, great signs in the heavens — I mean, did you see the night skies this week? Yep, we have ALL those signs, RIGHT now. We can INTERPRET Jesus' words to be a PREDICTION of the end of time. THE END IS NEAR!

It's easy to go DOWN that road. But let's take a deep breath. Jesus was SURELY thinking about the future, but when HAVEN'T we HEARD of wars and insurrections somewhere in the world? In the past 3400 years of recorded human history, we have seen only 268 years in which no major armed conflicts were being fought somewhere in the world. Can you believe that? In the history of the world, humans have been at peace for only 268 of those years, just 8 percent of the time.

Tuesday was Veterans Day. Veterans understand deeply "wars and insurrections." They know "nation will rise against nation" and "kingdom against kingdom." Veterans have served in the MIDST of terrifying, life-altering situations, in ORDER to seek justice, strive for the common good and bring peace.

So, when HAVEN'T there been wars and rumors of wars? When HAVEN'T nations and kingdoms fought against nations and kingdoms? When HAVEN'T there been great earthquakes and famines and plagues on earth, and unexplainable events in the heavens. There hasn't been ANY time in human history when some of these things were NOT happening. They've ALWAYS been with us. Generation after generation, since the disciples themselves, have looked to the heavens and seen portents and signs.

So one thing is clear – we are NOT the FIRST people to live in times of anxiety and transition. We are NOT the FIRST to think our world is about to be turned upside down by political forces or personal tragedy. We are NOT the FIRST to deal with the temptation to obsess about "what MIGHT happen."

This is why Jesus says, "Beware that you are not led astray." If you read Jesus' words as a coded timeline, you're missing his point. The coach doesn't point to the time remaining on the game clock to get his players thinking about what they're going to do AFTER the game; he points to the clock to get their heads more INTO the game itself. When mom says, "Just wait until your father gets home!", it's not really ABOUT the FUTURE event of father coming home; it's about changing your behavior NOW, in the PRESENT.

And that's what JESUS was doing. He wasn't predicting the FUTURE; he was pointing to the PRESENT. The time of this text has ALWAYS been the PRESENT. These things have ALWAYS been happening. So the issue was NEVER, "WHEN is this going to happen?", but rather, "NOW that it HAS happened and IS happening, what do we do NOW, in the MEANTIME? How do we live in the MIDST of these times?"

We know ALL TOO WELL that nothing we make or do for OURSELVES lasts FOREVER, but there is ONE thing that IS forever, that was here before we were BORN, and will see us THROUGH to eternal life. That ONE thing is the grace and love of God, that comes to us in Christ Jesus. THAT much is sure. THAT much we know.

We DON'T know the FUTURE. And in the end, Jesus isn't interested in TELLING us what the future holds – about when, or where, or how it will happen; Jesus is ONLY concerned with WHO. HE is the one who is coming, and it's HIS hands that are HOLDING the future.

And when you know who holds the FUTURE, then you know who holds your EVERY moment.

Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Not a hair of your head will perish."

Now what does he MEAN by that? It DOESN'T mean that if you have faith, you'll be BULLET proof, that NOTHING will hurt you. We KNOW THAT'S not true, because we've SEEN GOOD people SUFFER. And Jesus even SAYS some believers will DIE because of their faith. That was ESPECIALLY true of his DISCIPLES. So what does it MEAN to be protected?

In Tolkien's book the Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo says, "I wish none of this had happened." And Gandalf responds, "So do ALL who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All WE have to decide is what to DO with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, BESIDES the will of evil."

Jesus says, "Use your time as an opportunity to testify to others." I've seen that for myself. I have been with people who were DYING, who DIED SO WELL that they taught everyone around them how to LIVE. People who experienced such tremendous suffering and pain, but never complained, never lost hope, never lost the light. When people visited them, the VISITORS were the ones who came away feeling better about their lives. They KNEW where their journey was taking them, and they faced the valley of the shadow of death with such COURAGE, that we KNEW that they weren't walking ALONE.

"Don't be afraid. Not a hair of your head will perish. Use your time as an opportunity to testify to others." Those SAINTS GAVE a testimony to their Lord, without ever SAYING a WORD. They KNEW that they were protected, that even though would die, they would live, and so with the little time they had left, they SHOWED us what LIFE LOOKS like.

There was a time in my OWN life, when my faith was shaken. A time, many YEARS AGO now, when I was HURT, DEEPLY. A time I didn't know what to do, or how to recover. A time I was on the edge of despair.

That day, I didn't know what was next, but I DID know WHO HOLDS the future. I looked to my Lord, and he says HERE, "Don't be afraid. Not a hair of your head will perish." He says, even when things seem to be breaking apart, and the very foundations of the world seem to be crumbling, and betrayal is coming from every side ... take a deep breath, and TRUST him. He'll GIVE you the words to say and the actions to perform. CHRIST IS LORD, now and forever—of today and ALL our TOMORROWS.

No matter how DARK and COLD the night gets, tomorrow will be another day. SOON we'll be able to see again. It WILL get warmer. In the words of Malachi, "The sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings."

So don't be afraid. Don't WORRY about things to come. The future, and every last hair on your head, is in God's hands. And there is NO BETTER place to be. Amen.