

Reformation Sunday
October 29, 2017
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Mark 13: 5-11 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

“Hold Onto What Matters”

You plop your suitcase onto your bed and start stuffing clothes into it. When you try to shut it, you have to rethink what you want to take. And if you are flying and you have to pay extra for each suitcase, you really have to strategize. Is this a luxury or something you actually need?

There was a survey conducted recently about the things we can't live without. It asked people: “After basic elements for survival are met—food, water, shelter — what modern luxuries do you consider indispensable?”¹ Can you guess the top two answers? If you guessed Wi-Fi and smartphones, you would be correct. And just in case we are tempted to pile on a certain generation and heap them with scorn, realize the third most cherished item is a pet.

We're not here today to talk about how frivolous or vital it is to have a smartphone. We want to know what is absolutely essential for our lives with God. And if you think of times when your life is turned upside down, when you have to move and make choices and decide what's worth keeping, packing, transporting, and unpacking and what you are actually going to us, you have a different idea of value, of how important something is.

Jesus wants you to know some things are absolutely worth hanging onto. Jesus wants you to look to him in our all-too-fragile world. Jesus wants you to hold onto his promises at costs. Even when everything else is falling apart, holding onto Jesus is what really matters.

Jesus is having a sit-down chat, a heart to heart talk with his disciples. Jesus takes the approach of a parent when a child doesn't understand the value of education. So the parent has to sit down and explain why you should stay in school, why you should invest time in

¹ [Luxuries We Can't Live Without](https://www.thermosoft.com/en-US/blog/luxuries-we-cant-live-without). © 1996-2017 ThermoSoft International Corporation. <https://www.thermosoft.com/en-US/blog/luxuries-we-cant-live-without>

your studies, why you should dedicate years of your life to bettering yourself. Most of us just read about the economy and shrug our heads. But an economic advisor will sit down with government officials and policy shapers to explain the short term sacrifices that will get the economy booming again. People who want us to have clean air and clean water will tell us about the dangers of being careless today, how it can have severe consequences for our health in the future and the health of our children and grandchildren.

And yet we can do everything in our power to prepare as best as we can for the future and never be able to guarantee the results. Some very intelligent voices today are questioning the value of spending tens of thousands of dollars on college when it doesn't guarantee a better chance at a good paying job. Pushing all the levers of the economy and enacting all kinds of environmental safeguards can never guarantee things will turn out as the experts plan. We can prepare as best as we can for an unstable future, but we can never hold onto all those efforts, because there is no certain hope they will give us the results we are after.

And we know why, don't we? We know why, even if we don't want to admit to it. We are shocked by hurricanes like Harvey and Irma and Maria. But we know they will happen. We are shocked by earthquakes that flatten entire villages. But we know we should expect them. We are shocked by the evil of one man senselessly taking the lives of 58 other people just trying to enjoy a concert. But mankind's inhumanity toward his fellow man is part of this world.

We know Jesus has tried to prepare us for this reality of this world. Jesus said to his disciples 2,000 years ago: **"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."** (Mark 13:7,8) Jesus isn't trying to bum out his disciples. He just wants them to be realistic about the world in which we live. He wants all of us to be prepared for this reality, so we hold onto what really matters in the face of things that challenge us and shake us to the core.

Disturbances and catastrophes that make you feel small. You can start to feel like some insignificant flea on this blob orbiting around the sun. And you can start to wonder if it is really worth it.

Then the attacks get personal. I'd like to tell you about a friend named Ahmad. He left his home country in the Middle East looking for work in Japan. Lonely and a little homesick, he struck up a friendship with a Christian missionary from America. After many conversations and questions, after hours and months of studying the Bible, Ahmad became a Christian. Even though he knew what it would mean. He would never be able to go home. Anyone back home who knew of his conversion to Christianity would be able to kill him, no questions asked. So he could never go back home. He could never see his family again. The people he had cherished the most, he would no longer be able to hold onto, at least not in the same way.

Ahmad's situation might be extreme, but it's real. In fact, Jesus warns his disciples: **"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them."** (Mark 13:9) The dangers for disciples of Jesus are real. You might never have your life threatened because of your allegiance to Jesus, but the attacks will come and they will be personal. You might wonder if you can tell your family what you really believe out of fear that they will think differently of you. Your friends might call you unkind names if you tell them you take the words and claims of Jesus seriously, all of them.

Whether the disturbing events are going on in our world or they hit close to home for the mere fact that we are Christians, Jesus warns us so we won't be alarmed. That's because we typically overreact in two opposite directions: stop caring or care too much. We can get fatalistic. If none of it matters, I might as well do whatever I want. I should just enjoy this life as much as possible and make the best of a bad situation. If no one can stop any of this from happening, we might as well do the best we can with this life and hope for the best.

Then there's the hunker-down approach. We can retreat into a bunker-like existence and avoid unnecessary contact with the evil world. I have been keeping watch this whole time and I realize the need to make sacrifices. Or I find my own security in what I've done. I've prepared enough that I don't need to get too worked up about anything. I can handle it.

Actually, both of those approaches are logical. But they aren't following the instructions from Jesus. Jesus says: **"Watch out!...be on your guard."** (Mark 13:5,9) When everything starts falling apart, Jesus wants you to hold onto the things that will always last, that really matter.

In Mark 13:1 the disciples were admiring the magnificent construction of the temple in Jerusalem. This temple had been part of a recent renovation that had been ongoing for more than 50 years already. It was built on a foundation of massive stone blocks. It seemed like something that would last and something worth holding onto. Those disciples were like us, simple folks. They were like small town tourists standing in the shadows of the Twin Towers or staring in awe at the Pentagon. And yet, he predicted the total destruction of the temple. To the disciples this was a total shock, like predicting another 9/11 or Las Vegas shooting. They were curious about times and dates, but Jesus wanted them to be prepared for something bigger.

As Jesus left the temple area on that Tuesday of Holy Week, real disaster was about to strike. In only a few days, Jesus would be handed over and flogged. Jesus would have to stand before rulers and give witness of his true identity. And then warfare between good and evil would meet on the battlefield of Calvary. The forces of the kingdom of Satan raged against the kingdom of God and left devastation on the body of God's own Son. And when Jesus had cried out his last breathe, an earthquake was unleashed on the land.

In a grim world of devastation and danger, Jesus held onto the one thing that really mattered. And because Jesus held onto the plan and promise of God, he was willing to be destroyed for our love of temporary things and won't matter in eternity. Because he held

onto his love for fallen sinners, Jesus took on himself our fear and anxiety of things outside our control. Because of his complete dedication to you, Jesus swallowed up your carelessness in the face of hints of evil and the finality of death when Jesus defeated death and evil by his resurrection.

The cross not only allows us to find some meaning and some purpose in evil and suffering, but it allows you to find your security in the cross of Christ, to live a life free from fear in his empty tomb. Watch! Be on your guard! Jesus says: **“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations,”** because Jesus is your only hope. (Mark 13:10) Jesus is your hope beyond an impressive temple, he is with you wherever you are in your darkest moments and your greatest victories. Jesus is your hope better than a bunker lifestyle, because he brings you peace with God. Jesus is your hope that is better than a momentary moratorium on disasters and catastrophes, he gives you a free pass into an eternal paradise with God.

Jesus tells disciples about the reality to come not so they engage in predictions, but prepare their hearts. There will be real concern over world events, but you don't need to become discouraged or disheartened. There will be real dangers striking close to home, but there is no need to doubt Savior or his goodness.

Today we begin five weeks of celebrating our Reformation heritage. This celebration would likely not exist if it weren't for the boldness of one of those chief Reformers. In April 1520 Martin Luther was called to give an answer for his rebelliousness toward his religious authorities. This time, he stood before Emperor Charles V, arguably the most powerful man in the world at that time. He knew that if he didn't apologize for what he had said and take back his inflammatory writings, you could very well be burned at the stake. But he simply couldn't. He had uncovered the truth of God's Word. The truth that every sinner is innocent before God only by God's grace because of what Jesus Christ had done was something Martin Luther couldn't compromise. He wouldn't take it back. He couldn't take it back. And because of that boldness, we get to celebrate the truths of the Bible today.

One Bible commentator says Jesus is really looking for a unique attitude from his disciples when he instructs them in these verses. We live with the urgency that each day could be our last, yet we carry out our earthly relationships under Christ as if the end could be very remote. We live in the real world. News of calamity drives us to pray. Dangerous persecutions drive us back to the Bible. Terrible personal tragedies drive us back into the church. Because that's where we get God's promises. That's where we find our hope in Christ.

The promises of the gospel will outlast any fading kingdom, every overstretched administration, all notorious nations. The good news of Jesus Christ will outlast heaven and earth themselves. Hold onto the good news of Jesus. Hold onto what really matters. Amen.

+ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. +