

Warning of Trial and Tribulation

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we heard about the time when the disciples were with Jesus walking out of the temple in Jerusalem. It must've been an awesome sight. While its outer walls and buildings were still under construction the temple itself stood approximately five stories high. It was splendid and many craftsmen had used their talents to the glory of God. I'm sure it was surprising to the disciples when Jesus predicted that the temple would be reduced to rubble. It was about 150 feet by 150 feet, and some of the stone blocks were 37 x 18 x 12 feet high and decorated with gold. And yet, as we heard in our Gospel reading, there wouldn't be one stone upon another. All that time was spent building the temple with its courtyards and adjoining porticos. All those talents used to glorify God - and none of it would endure.

Of course, the disciples wanted to know when and what signs they could look for when this would happen. So, Jesus warns them, ***"See that no one leads you astray."*** Because you can just imagine the people, who after Jesus died on Good Friday, would come and try to plant doubt in the minds of the disciples. And there was, of course, doubting Thomas, who on that first Easter said that he would not believe until he put his fingers in Jesus' hands and feet.

Now, have you ever heard the word, “*Agnotology?*” While I wasn’t able to find it in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is on Wikipedia. And, according to Wikipedia, it’s the study of deliberate, culturally-induced ignorance or doubt. First used by Professor Robert Procter, who was the first historian to testify against the tobacco industry. It’s been used to sell products and win public favor through publications with either inaccurate or misleading scientific data. It’s no wonder this world is so mixed up. Depending on your source, what you hear or read, may or may not be true.

As Christians, we know that the Word of God is true. It’s stood the test of time throughout generations. And we know it’s true also because we’ve personally seen its truth in our own lives. But that doesn’t always mean it’s proclaimed in truth. For while there have been many kinds of churches, some with more followers and wonderful buildings, that it doesn’t necessarily mean that the Gospel is being proclaimed in truth. And so, it’s no wonder Jesus says, **“*Many will come in my name claiming, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many.*”** For just as Jesus predicted, there have been many false Christ’s and false teachers, claiming to offer salvation. Many have followed to their demise. Names like Jim Jones, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, and David Koresh come to mind. And so, Jesus says to His disciples and to us, **“*You must be on your guard.*”**

Our Lord Jesus in today’s Gospel reading was trying to prepare His disciples for what was to come. He tells them, **“*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*”** And while they didn’t fully understand what He meant at the time, by 70AD Jerusalem would be in shambles. That beautiful and awe-inspiring temple building would be torn down and nothing would be left. And yet, His disciples would see other prophecies come true. Nation against

nation. Kingdom against kingdom. Earthquakes and famines. They're all signs of the beginning of birth pains.

And yet, the Lord also points to people themselves. Those within nations, those in relationship with one another. They too indicate the signs that the judgment is getting closer. For not only has sin and evil increased, but the love of many has grown cold. Just as St. Matthew once wrote, ***"...many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold."*** (Matt 24: 35)

Now, Jesus didn't want to scare His disciples. Rather, He did want to prepare them for what was to come. For after a few days of Jesus sharing this Gospel message with His disciples, He would go on to die on the cross. And while His disciples thought that all was lost, it simply wasn't the case. Our Lord Jesus had been preparing them to stand firm through His trial and death. He wasn't liked by everyone, and so those who thought they had power condemned Him to death. And Jesus suffered and died a painful death on the cross. And yet, He did so willingly...giving His very life for their sins, your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world so that whoever believes in Him might stand firm to the end and receive the crown of eternal life.

Jesus knew that His disciples would themselves go through trial and tribulation. Yet, He wanted them to stand firm and be ready. He said to them, ***"...you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them."*** And each one of them would go on to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord, even if that meant being handed over to councils, beaten, flogged, speared, beheaded, hanged, and crucified upside down. And yet, Jesus told them not to worry

or be anxious about what to say. They were simply to say whatever was given to you at the time because it wasn't them speaking, rather it was the Holy Spirit.

God had already delivered them as they stood firm, using their time, talent, and treasures in service of the proclamation of the Gospel. And because of it, the early church began to thrive and grow as we can read about in the book of Acts. More and more people came to faith and were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection just like we will baptize little - Callan Lacy - this morning. And some of the disciples were sent out as missionaries to proclaim the Gospel like the Fraher family is preparing to do this spring. And yet, thriving together, they furthered the proclamation of our Lord's Gospel out into the world.

Today, we're reminded that we aren't called - JUST to use our talents simply to build and maintain something in the temporal sense, but rather to stand firm in the Gospel, so that our time, talents, and treasures are used in service of the Gospel proclamation as well. Even Isaiah once said, ***"All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flowers fade when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*** (Isaiah 40:6b-8) It's our Lord's saving Gospel proclamation that is awesome in the sight of God. It's what helps us to stand firm to the very end. And it's what our world needs more than ever before.

In Jesus' name, Amen.