

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 19:41-48

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The prophet Jeremiah was called at a young age to warn the people of Judah of danger coming from the north and east. God's wrath would come upon His people via the Babylonians. As Jeremiah warned them, however, he told them that a remnant would remain. Consequently, the message to the people of Judah was to repent. Repent, and they would be counted among the remnant—they would be the remnant.

Jeremiah had the Assyrian conquest of Samaria to point to. It had happened some hundred years before, so it would be fresh in the people's minds. "Repent, or end up like your brothers to the north."

The Babylonians came. Judah was conquered. Jerusalem besieged and sacked. The temple was destroyed. The people were taken into captivity. Jeremiah wrote five poems lamenting the conquest. The first begins:

How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night, Her tears are on her cheeks; Among all her lovers She has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies. Judah has gone into captivity, Under affliction and hard servitude; She dwells among the nations, She finds no rest; All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits. (Lamentations 1:1-3)

Jesus has entered Jerusalem. He is making His way to the cross to die for the sins of the world. In today's text, Jesus weeps for the city:

If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.

Jesus will, shortly, lament over the city again:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matthew 23:37-39)

After the death of John, Jesus took up the Baptizer's message, which was always His own: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) It's the message He preached through the prophet Jeremiah, the message of repentance.

Part of that message is the cleansing of the temple. Merchants, and I use the term loosely, had set up tables in the temple courtyards at which they sold the sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices and exchanged currency at outrageous rates. Worshipers would come to the temple to offer their sacrifices only to become victims of extortion in order to offer those sacrifices. No wonder it was said by the prophet, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) The sacrifices were a good thing, but not at the money-changers' tables; no mercy or knowledge of

God was displayed there, and this right in the temple courtyards! “My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Days will come when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you. Your house will be left to you desolate!”

Destruction is coming again. Jerusalem will be sacked, and the temple will be destroyed. It's not the Babylonians, this time, but the occupying Romans who will do it. You can read about it in the annals of Josephus, but the city is leveled under the command of Titus, who would later become Roman Emperor, and “not one stone was left upon another.” (cf. Luke 21:6) The arch dedicated to Titus' victory over Jerusalem still stands in Rome to this day.

Martin Luther warned the Germans about the passing shower that is the Word of God, how God's grace and favor seem to pass from one group of people to another. In his 1524 letter To The Councilmen of All Cities in Germany, Luther wrote,

Let us remember our former misery, and the darkness in which we dwelt. Germany, I am sure, has never before heard so much of God's word as it is hearing today; certainly we read nothing of it in history. If we let it just slip by without thanks and honor, I fear we shall suffer a still more dreadful darkness and plague. O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year. (AE 45:352-353)

Go to Germany today, and you will find Christian churches, orthodox Lutheran churches among them, but they are few and far between, even fewer and further for the orthodox Lutherans. The country is predominantly humanistic and atheistic. The market, as it was written, has moved away from the door of the Germans.

Throughout history, mankind has had a hard time recognizing, hearing, receiving, and believing the Word of God. Every time, the Word of God moves on from that place and to another. Sometimes, wrath and destruction accompany the passing shower. In all cases, though, there is a remnant. It is the remnant that repents and believes the Gospel, because, even among them, there is difficulty recognizing, hearing, receiving, and believing the Word of God.

That is the condition you find yourself in, too, dear hearers. The Word of God is proclaimed to you, Jesus is given to you, the Lord Himself comes to you, visits you, and your Old Adam blinds you to all of it. You do not know the time of your visitation! And you suffer the assaults of the devil.

Look at the world around you, and see those assaults. Gay marriage is declared legal in all 50 states, and outside of the Church, it's hard to see a reason why that is a bad thing. Stories are breaking week after week of the atrocities that are committed against the most helpless among us—the unborn—as they are ripped from their mothers' wombs, and their parts sold on a black market that is all but ignored by those in authority. And again, outside of the Church, it's difficult to see a reason why these parts shouldn't be experimented on instead of simply discarded as rubbish. These are but two of the most recent and perhaps harshest examples as one lives in the world, struggling not to be of the world. Still, there are many instances where something only seems right, but God's Word clearly delineates

between what is good and what is evil, calling that thing evil.

What's not so difficult, however, is to see brothers in sisters in Christ who fall for this and accommodate their confession to the whims of society—they try to be not only in the world, but of the world. So, there are those who call themselves Christian who condone, support, and perform homosexual marriage instead of calling them to the same repentance to which they themselves are called—to acknowledge that what God calls evil is actually evil, and to live in the forgiveness which He has freely given in Christ Jesus, the Lord and Savior of all. There are even some who call themselves Christian who will brazenly say, "God bless Planned Parenthood and the work that they do." Once again, the message or repentance is muddled underneath a desire to "fit in" or "do right" by people, contrary to the doctrine and commands of God.

One might wonder, then: Is the Word of God on its way out from among us—from the people of this land? The attacks against Christianity would indicate so. The departure from sound doctrine among Christians would also indicate so. All of this begs the question: Will destruction by the wrath of God accompany this passing shower of the Gospel?

I cannot answer that. Such an answer has not been revealed to me. I don't have such prophetic insight; honestly, no one today does, as the office of prophet is closed. But I would be a fool to say that such destruction is outside the realm of possibility.

What I can do is repeat the message of Jeremiah, of John, of Jesus, and of Luther: repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Jesus still comes among you, in His Word and Sacraments. And Jesus is at work to cleanse His temple.

For one thing, He sends His Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth. Jesus is at work through the Word proclaimed to instruct you, to be a lamp unto your feet and a light upon your path. (cf. Psalm 119:105) By it, Jesus leads you to know what is right and what is wrong; He breaks through the darkness and blindness of your Old Adam, so that He may lead you into paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (cf. Psalm 23:3) He purges out the old leaven of unsound doctrine only to replace it with the new lump of His Word and grace and truth. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7) So, by His grace, He cleanses this place, that it may be a house of prayer, and not a den of thieves that would rob you of your confidence in Jesus Christ and your salvation in Him.

For another thing, He cleanses you in the process. For by that message of repentance, He leads you to know your sin and confess the same. Now is the day of your visitation. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2b) Today, right now, Jesus is among you. You heard Him in His words earlier, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins." You will receive Him in His body and blood under the bread and wine in just a few moments. Jesus is here and now...for you! He gives Himself to you in order that you may be cleansed, redeemed, and restored—brought out of death and into life, His Church, His people, His remnant.

This is God's gift to you in Jesus Christ. He gives you faith to recognize, hear, receive, and believe Jesus in His means. "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29), "and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31b) This may very well be the beginning of another remnant, and you a part of it. If that is the case, it is all by God's grace, because He has forgiven you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.