

**The Second-Last Sunday before Advent, November 13, 2022**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **Your Redemption Draws Near**

Luke 21:5–28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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Jesus said: **“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (vv 25–28).

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I carry a little calendar with me, a day planner. I bet you’ve got something similar, maybe in digital format. This planner helps me remember important dates. It helps me keep track of upcoming events and projects. It enables me to set aside time to prepare sermons and Bible studies, and for appointments and meetings. When I can’t find it, I feel lost, disorganized. I don’t know where I’m supposed to be or what I’m supposed to be doing. My calendar keeps things in front of me even when they don’t have specific dates, even when they’re still a long way off.

The church’s calendar of worship services and readings is like that. It helps us remember and reflect on things that we might otherwise ignore or forget. We need the discipline and structure of the Church Year, just as we require calendars for daily life.

This morning the readings, prayers, and hymns direct our attention to an important upcoming event: the end of the world and Christ’s return. The final weeks of the church year focus on these “last things.” Jesus will come again **“in a cloud with power and great glory”** (v 27) to judge the living and the dead. This hope shapes us. It shapes how we live on earth. Our days aren’t simply a meaningless repetition of mornings and evenings, of weeks, months, and years. Instead, each day looks forward to the great Day of the Lord. Each day draws us one day closer.

KNOWING JESUS’ PROMISE TO COME AGAIN,  
WE LIVE WITH FAITH AND HOPE AS WE AWAIT OUR FINAL REDEMPTION.

In our Gospel reading, a simple comment about the beauty of the temple leads Jesus to discuss upcoming events. He uses the temple's magnificent stones as object lessons to teach about the future—the future of that temple, the future of Jerusalem, and the future of the universe. They won't last forever. And because they won't last forever, they can't provide eternal security or a lasting refuge. In the temple—that marvel of design and construction—not one stone would be left on another. Stone by stone, that temple would be torn down, leveled, destroyed in a coming judgment. In a coming judgment that serves as a preview for the final judgment of the world.

This brings up the usual questions: When will it happen? What will be the signs? How do we prepare for it? Well, why do you want to know? How would knowing the date of Christ's return help you live by faith? How would a detailed outline of the end-time events give you hope? As if that's all we need to be well prepared—day, time, and order of events. As if that would equip us to handle it from there. But faith differs from knowledge. Faith lives not by what it knows about the future but by trusting the One who holds the future in His hands. Do we wish to be like God, knowing the beginning and the end? God has made us to be on a need-to-know basis—and we don't need to know the date of Christ's return. Trying to figure that out actually makes us less prepared.

The only preparation for the future announced by Jesus is Jesus Himself. The disciples stare at the temple stones awaiting destruction. He's the stone cut by no human hand that stands forever (Dan 2:44, 45). **“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”** (Lk 20:17), Jesus said. And the priests and scribes and leaders rejected Him. They wrecked His body. They leveled Him to the ground, the grave. They never imagined what happened next. On the third day, the temple of His body rose from the grave, just as He promised (Jn 2:19–22).

What Jesus says about “the end” cannot be understood apart from His death and resurrection. On Good Friday, the world was judged and all sin was condemned in His body. On Easter Sunday, He was raised from the dead as the first fruits of the resurrection. Don't get caught up in questions about the end. Good Friday and Easter are the days and events that we need to know. Those who take refuge in Him have redemption on the last day. Those who take refuge in Him will be delivered from death and every evil. Those who take refuge in Him will have a blessed end.

Jesus warns us about false christs. They'll come. They'll come claiming to be Him, saying “I am he” and “The time is at hand.” Don't pay any attention to them. They're just as worthless as those temple stones—destined for destruction, unable to save. So

that we won't be deceived, the real Jesus has given us His word. His forgiveness echoes in our ears. His true body and blood are present on this altar. The One who will come again is with us even now. In this very place, He's a shelter from the storms of life. He's a refuge from the world's tumult. Today Jesus is our redemption, the forgiveness of sins, our life, and salvation. Without Him, we're most certainly lost. Faith looks to Jesus.

Because of what Jesus did in the past and does in the present, His disciples—including us—can endure the future. Jesus tells us what to expect as we await His coming. He describes the last days as a difficult time, a time of tribulation: nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, diseases, and wars. Terrors and signs in the heavens. Persecution, suffering, and even death for Christians on earth. These things have been taking place ever since Jesus spoke of them. You could see these signs in 2002 and in 2012 just as we see them today. Signs of the end. The death throes of the universe. Have our senses become so dull that we can no longer recognize them for what they are? Yet the end is everywhere foreshadowed. We have daily reminders that the Lord will come again and bring to end this fallen creation.

We know that He's coming because His word is true. Already the things He said have taken place. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, just as He predicted. His disciples were put to death for confessing their faith. Jerusalem was surrounded, besieged, trampled underfoot. Those who heeded His word escaped to the hills and were spared. Now He places us in the period between that destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. He calls this "the times of the Gentiles," a time in which the Gospel spreads from Jerusalem into the whole world. Disciples are made of "all nations" through baptizing and teaching.

We have an opportunity to bear witness to the world that the end-time salvation is found in Him. What looks like slowness on the Lord's part is simply His patience, "**not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance**" (2 Pet 3:9). Waiting for the Second Coming and observing the signs of the world's end, the Church continues to do the work that Christ gave her: to call to repentance, to forgive sins, to proclaim the Gospel. So live boldly and confidently, because you live in light of your eternal redemption. Make your daily sacrifices and offerings based of what Jesus gives and promises.

The upcoming events that Jesus describes sound frightening. The world will come to an end. The sun, moon, and stars will fail. The earth will shake and the oceans will be in an uproar. Terror will seize the world. When everything falls apart, when death approaches, when the end comes, Jesus instructs us to stand tall, to lift our heads. The Son of Man will come again. We will see Him with our own eyes. The redemption that

is already ours will enter full bloom—the joys of paradise, the resurrection of the body, the new heavens and the new earth, eternal life with Christ, perfect redemption. In Jesus, we have a sure and certain hope.

We can't put a particular date on this Second Coming, but it's still on our calendar. The Church Year keeps it there, so we don't forget. We know that it'll happen, just as Jesus said. We know that He brings our redemption. We live now in the light of that promise, forgiven by Jesus, secure in Jesus, awaiting Jesus. Lift up your heart. The day is surely drawing near.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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*Revised from a sermon preached for the Second-Last Sunday before Advent in 2010  
at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*