

First Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." (NIV)

When I was young I was in the 4H club. I only joined because they had a basketball team I wanted to play on. But in order to be a part of this program I also had to do something else so I chose woodworking. Some of you who know me are laughing already. As a member of the woodworking club we had to pick a project, make it, and then enter it into the county fair to be judged. The idea was to pick something out of this book to make for your father. I made a wooden cord hanger for my dad to wrap his extension cords around so they would not have to be hung on a nail or laid on the floor in the corner of the garage. It was the easiest thing I saw to make. So I cut it out in the shape it was supposed to look like or close enough to the shape, did just a *little* sanding on it, slapped on a coat of paint, and stenciled the word Dad on it. Just like that, without a lot of time or effort, it was done.

Then it came time to enter it into the county fair. All the fathers were there with their sons. My dad and I started to look around and we saw one boy made this big treasure chest, another boy built his dad this bow and arrow rack, and we noticed many other impressive things. My dad looked again at my cord hanger. Then he said *"I'm not going to stay here to watch this piece of junk get judged."* So he left me to face the judges alone. Somehow I didn't win. Yet, years and years later I remember looking in my dad's garage and seeing his extension cords nicely wrapped around that wooden hanger I had made. I wondered if that had outlasted those other impressive things and even made a comment to my father about how many of the other dads are still using their gifts this many years later.

It actually got me to think about what lasts and what passes away. How many things that once impressed us, how many things we put so much time and effort into, how many things have we expended energy into getting, are now things we no longer have or use or even remember what happened to them? What did we once consider treasure that is today trash? And what are some things that we might have overlooked that are still with us? What are some things we perhaps took for granted or even considered as junk, but are things that are still useful? Is there anything we might have considered trash that we now see as true

treasure? How much more will this be clear to see on the Last Day! This morning our Savior focuses us on what is really important. I pray His Word has each of us carefully considering this question: **What will truly last?**

As has been our focus in the season of end time we are reminded again today that God has set a day for judgment. Jesus will return to judge all the living and the dead. We do not know the day or hour Jesus will return. Yet, Jesus wants us to see the signs that this day is coming. Just like you can look at a fig tree and all the trees, watch them sprout, and know that summer is coming. So there are many signs (in nature, in society, and in the church) that the day of Jesus' return is drawing nearer and nearer. Could this new church year be the year? If so, Jesus wants us to be ready and to understand the answer to the question of what lasts.

What will truly last? Jesus tells us: ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*** Did you hear what is not going to last? Everything in the whole universe will be gone. Peter writes: ***"the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."*** (2 Peter 3) So think of some of the things you consider as treasure that would be gone just like that if Jesus returned today. Your house, car, and phone; your career, titles, and trophies; your retirement funds, investments, money, and goals – even your wooden extension cord hanger - it all will be gone. Heaven and earth will pass away! We understand this, right? We know that all the things here on earth are temporary - that these things we treasure now will all one day be trash - that none of it will truly last. Or do we ever forget this? Do we ever live like chasing after these things that will all pass away is the most important thing in the world?

Did you hear what truly lasts? Jesus' words will never pass away. His words are eternal. His promises are sure. His words are the truth and the life. His words are a light for our feet and a lamp for our path. We know this, right? So we spend lots of time with this treasure. We recognize what really matters. Or is the Word of God something that has been too often overlooked and taken for granted? Is your Bible at home considered a treasure or piled over with the junk? Do we even know where it is? Is it collecting dust somewhere?

We are all guilty at times of not seeing Jesus' words as the priceless treasure they are! So we need to be told again and again. We need to be reminded and have our eyes opened to what truly lasts. That's why in love Jesus warns: ***"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*** Jesus knows how easy it is for us to waste all our time and effort and energy on things that will pass away. Christ knows how dangerous the temptation is to live a life of self indulgence. Our Savior doesn't want us to be weighed down by the pleasures or the troubles of this world. He doesn't want His return to come upon us ***"unexpectedly like a trap."***

Instead, Jesus wants us to watch and pray. He wants us to be ready and waiting. He wants us to be able to stand before Him on the Last Day without fear. So He wants us to think about what will last. ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*** His Word will never pass away! Aren't we reminded of this wonderful truth in our preparations for Christmas? ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son" (Isaiah 7). "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of***

Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5). ***“This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness”*** (Jeremiah 23). My words will never pass away. When we look and see the manger, the cross, the empty tomb – we are reminded of just how true this is when Jesus tells us: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”***

That means words like: ***“It is finished (John 19) and...“Take heart, your sins are forgiven”*** are now things that will truly last. His word of forgiveness and peace to us will never pass away. Since His Word and promise of being our Savior was true all the way to the cross and grave and out of the grave again – we know the same will be true in the words spoken of Jesus’ second coming. ***“I am going to prepare a place for you...I will come back to take you to be where I am”*** (John 14). ***“This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will return in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”*** (Acts 1). ***“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness”*** (2 Peter 3). On the day that heaven and earth pass away, then my friends we will see most clearly that His Word will never pass away.

So I pray we learn to look at things from the perspective Jesus gives us today by answering the question of what will last. Then we will start to see all the things that sometimes impress us, things we once treasured, not as trash or junk because those things too are blessings, but as blessings from God that are only temporary. I pray we repent for the times we have treated God’s Word for anything less than what it is and I pray we start to see it and use it for what it really is – a lasting treasure that will never pass away. It is always worthy of our time, and effort, and energy. His Word is truly a gift that keeps on giving! May His Word prepare us to celebrate again the coming of our Savior at Christmas and at His final return! Amen.