

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Somebody once said that we can live 40 days without food, 3 days without water, and 8 minutes without air. But we can't live a single second without hope. That's a powerful statement. The dictionary defines hope as a desire for a favorable outcome in the future. To be able to look forward with the expectation of a positive outcome is what gives people the energy and motivation to put forth the effort to keep moving forward in life. When the future doesn't look very good, when you don't expect anything positive to happen or see no way out of your situation, it's easy to lose hope. When people lose hope, they lose their ability to dream for the future. Despair replaces joy. Fear replaces faith. Anxiety replaces prayer. Insecurity replaces confidence. Hope for the future plays an important role in our lives.

What hope do you have for the future? Today we start a new church year. Whenever we begin something new there always seems to be an aura of hope that comes with it. A new season brings with it new hope for a how a team will do. A new school year brings with it the hope of new things to learn. A new year brings with it the hope for new possibilities and experiences and opportunities. What hope do you have for the future? This is important for us to consider. Our world is filled with a lot of uncertainty. There are many things which happen to us and around us on a daily basis which could cause us to lose hope as we look into the future. Too often, the way which we use the word hope in our world carries the thought more of something we wish would happen but aren't too sure that it's going to happen. We use the word hope to mean more of a wish than to express our confidence in something going forward. As we begin our new church year, we spend our time in this season of Advent focusing on the second coming of Jesus when he will come to bring this world to an end. We do that also preparing to celebrate the first coming of Jesus when he came into the world as our Savior in Bethlehem. These two events are connected. Because of what Jesus did for us in his first coming, he gives us hope as we anticipate his second coming. This Advent as we consider the different gifts which Jesus gave to us in his first coming, we want to start with that gift of hope. God encourages us today that no matter what we face as we look forward to Jesus' second coming, we can **Live in Hope**.

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. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ²⁹ He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁴ "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ 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."*

Hope may not be the first thing which comes to our minds as we listen to these words of Jesus. These words by Jesus were spoken on Tuesday of Holy Week. The disciples had remarked just prior to these words about how beautiful the Temple was. This prompted Jesus to discuss the time when the Temple was going to be destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem. This topic about Jerusalem's fall then led Jesus into a discussion about the end of the world when he would come again. Earlier in this chapter as well as in the accounts recorded in the other Gospels, Jesus had listed some of the signs which pointed to his coming. We can list these signs into two categories: 1—signs that he is coming SOON; and 2—signs that He is HERE. Some of the signs which point to the fact that Jesus is coming soon would be: wars and rumors of war, people come claiming to be him; earthquakes, famines, terrible, natural disasters, his people facing persecutions, etc. These have been taking place since Jesus ascended into heaven. You can't turn on the radio or television or look at a news feed on the internet without hearing about these kinds of events taking place.

The signs in our text are those which will immediately precede Jesus' coming and will tell us that he is here. What Jesus tells us sounds pretty scary: *"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. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."* What a sight it will be! It will seem as if creation itself is falling apart. The forces of nature will be thrown into turmoil. It will be nothing like we've ever seen before. They will be so transformed that there will be no doubt the end is near. The world as you and I know it will undergo such a change that it will be evident to everyone—believer and unbeliever alike—that the end is near. It will be so outside the normal that men will faint in fear. They will have no idea what is happening and will run in panic trying to get away from what is happening. Mark tells us the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give light. The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Oh what a sight this will be!

The scariest part of Jesus coming back to this earth in all of his power and glory is having to stand before him. Standing before Jesus the perfect judge as a sinful person doesn't give us a lot of hope. Standing before the almighty God

in judgment for the lives we have lived and having to give account for all the things that we have done doesn't leave us overly optimistic for our eternal future. We know that we are sinners who have rebelled against Almighty God. Imagine the fear that will grip the heart in thinking about having to stand before Jesus! Imagine the sheer terror that will rip through those who have denied the existence of God or the divinity of Jesus! Imagine the distress and horror that those will experience who have laughed at the prophecies concerning the end of the world and did not prepare themselves to receive their king when he comes again. When Jesus comes, we can imagine the anguish, fear and despair which will overcome those who have sinned against God and know the judgement they deserve. There is very little to hope for when you stand before almighty God as a sinful person.

Yet listen to what Jesus encourages: "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" We don't need to be afraid of these events. We don't need to be surprised by what is happening or afraid of what they mean. We can live in hope and confidence. We have confidence of a favorable outcome of these things because of what Jesus has done for us. And this isn't a wish or an expectation—it is a certainty. When all of these signs are taking place, we can lift our heads up off of the challenges and troubles of today and rejoice with certainty in the redemption that is ours because of Jesus. The coming of Jesus for those who know and believe in him as Lord and Savior means deliverance. These are the signs that the painful, stressful, difficult life on earth is over. The coming of Jesus means deliverance from the evils and the sufferings of this world. The coming of Jesus means the beginning of eternity with Jesus in heaven. We can live in hope despite the challenges that we face because we know the favorable outcome that awaits us in the future is deliverance from the pain and suffering of here to live with Jesus forever in heaven.

What gives us such certainty that this will all happen are the words of Jesus. Jesus told us this is what will happen. He promised us that the blood he shed when he came to earth the first time has purified us from every sin. He promised that through his sacrifice, he has made us blameless and perfect before God. And we have history on our side to give us certainty that all of this will happen. God's promises fulfilled in Jesus' first coming give us confidence he will keep his promises in regards to Jesus' second coming. From the time that Adam and Eve first sinned, God promised that he would send a Messiah into the world to rescue the world from sin. He did that when he sent Jesus into the world in Bethlehem with the mission to sacrifice himself for the sin of the world. God kept his promise. In the section prior to our text, Jesus promised that Jerusalem would be destroyed because the Jews had rejected him as the Messiah. That happened in 70 AD. God has fulfilled all of his promises about the first coming of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem. We can live in the hope of knowing he will keep all of his promises regarding Jesus' second coming as well. This is what causes us to lift our heads in certainty and joy to live in hope as we look forward to his return.

So we rejoice as we celebrate Jesus' first coming and look forward in hope to his second coming. The encouragement which Jesus offers to us here is be careful and watchful as we live in hope of His second coming. Jesus hasn't told us when this day will come. We've seen all the signs fulfilled to know that he can come at any time. So we need to be ready and focused and prepared to meet him whenever that day will come. At all times, we need to live in hope of Jesus' return. We need these words of admonition and caution. Even though we are believers who trust in Jesus as our Savior and long for his return, we still have sinful natures. We still need that warning against being ungodly. When Jesus comes again, no one will escape his judgment. It's important that we don't become lax in our watchfulness. It's easy to grow careless in our Christian lives and live as if the end isn't coming soon. When we don't live with the expectation of Christ's imminent return, we let the worldly living around us—carousing, partying and the anxieties of life take over us. We are tempted by the cares and pleasures of this world to forget God's eternal purpose. We don't want to be found living as the people of this world when Jesus comes again and be unprepared for that time. Jesus offers a pretty stern warning about being unprepared for his coming. How important that we heed this warning and live in hope.

While Jesus offers a stern warning against ungodliness and unbelief, he offers a rich promise of life to all who believe in Jesus. We do well to heed this warning and stay watchful and vigilant as we look forward in hope and joy. Jesus encourages us: Be careful—watch yourselves. Be alert to where you are. Acknowledge the temptations before you, know the ones that are especially hard for you, and avoid them. Be mindful of the ongoing need to be strengthened by Word and Sacrament and don't neglect that which sustains your faith. Be watchful—live every day with the expectation: Today is the day Christ comes back. Don't let the passing of days lull you to sleep. Finally, pray. This is how we remain alert—we talk to God daily, asking him to give us all that we need to stand before the Son of Man when he comes again.

Life between the two comings of Christ is not easy. There is still suffering and strife even for the believer. Yet we as Christians can endure and live joyful, purposeful lives. We have hope! In Jesus, we have a peace which passes all understanding and a hope that is certain and sure. We can lift our heads from the problems we face because we know the life that awaits. We have a reason for joy despite any sorrow that comes as we look forward to the deliverance which Jesus' promised. We have a reason to be on guard and remain firm in our faith. Our redemption is drawing night. Our Savior is coming to rescue us. This is our hope. This our certainty for the future based on the sure and certain word of God himself. Our hope is not a naïve wish that things will get better. Our hope is rooted in the forgiveness and life which Jesus brought with his first coming which guarantees things will be better when he comes again. What a gift Jesus brings to us through his first coming. He gives us hope for his second coming. While that day will bring incomprehensible terror for those who have aligned themselves with this world, for those of us who are wrapped in Christ's righteousness, it will be a day of great deliverance. Live in that hope. Amen.