

One of the most popular questions is “When?” When will dinner be ready? When will we get there? When is this assignment due? Everyone, including us, always wants to know when.

Jesus’ disciples, too. They want to know when. Here in our text they ask this question twice in the same sentence. “*Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?*” When, Jesus, when? But He doesn’t answer their question. He gives a lengthy response, yet He never tells them when.

Others do. Have you kept track of how many self-proclaimed prophets and prophetesses over the years have answered the disciples’ question? “I’ll tell you when,” they brazenly declare. “The end of the world will come on such and such day.” Obviously, they have all been wrong.

We don’t know when. Jesus does not tell us. It is not for us to know. But He does answer a different question. What? He tells us what will happen. And so, that is the question we take up today. Not when, but what?

And the *what* is quite sobering. Jesus begins by telling what will happen to the temple in Jerusalem. “*Not one stone will be left upon another.*” It will be utterly destroyed. That’s quite a *what*, isn’t it? “Do not enter the city,” warns Jesus. “Instead, flee to the mountains. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, the day of its vengeance has come. Leave!” And before this time, He says, “there will be great signs in the heavens, and you will be persecuted for being a Christian.”

Jesus says what will happen, and we know from the history books that this is exactly what did happen. We even know the *when*. The year 70. Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and devastated it. They completely destroyed the temple, and it has never been rebuilt. The historian, Josephus, reports that one million Jews were killed by these Roman armies, and nearly one hundred thousand were taken captive. He also reports that before the year 70, as Jesus also predicted, there were powerful and strange occurrences in the heavens above. And from the Book of Acts we know that Christians were persecuted.

Why does all this matter to us? Because the *what* that happened then is a preview of the *what* that will happen in the end. Wars and tumults, says Jesus. Persecution of Christians. False prophets and false teachers. Signs and wonders in the heavens like eclipses, comets, and such. Earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes, and other natural disasters.

Have you noticed that when such powerful signs occur, there are always some who cry, “It’s the end of the world!” They have the *what* right, but not the *when*. All these events will take place before the end, but we do not know how soon after these events the end will come.

Indeed, these are taking place right now. Do you think the war in Ukraine is a coincidence? That disastrous hurricanes are a result of climate change? That eclipses and other phenomena in the heavens have nothing to say to us? Jesus predicted all these things. These are signs. Signs that this world is passing away. And the one million who were killed when Jerusalem fell is nothing compared to how many will perish in the end.

Is all this reason to be anxious? Those in the world certainly are. There is great distress of the nations, as Jesus puts it. People are perplexed. They are in dread of the end. All of creation is becoming unhinged, unglued, and they cannot stop it. "No more fossil fuels!" they cry, "We have to save our planet!" But there's no saving it. Jerusalem and its temple could not be saved, nor can this world. The day of vengeance is coming. Jerusalem was leveled because the people rejected Jesus. And so, also, this world has a day of judgment coming. For it, too, cares nothing about its Creator, its Lord, and its Savior.

So, we know the what, even though we do not know when. And the *what* which is coming is dreadful. It's as if this world is a sick patient lying upon a hospital bed. It's gasping for air. Its heartbeat is becoming more and more faint. It's dying. The patient is dying on the hospital bed and the doctor's hands are tied. There is nothing that can be done to save this world. It's a matter of time before it breathes its last.

So, why would you and I want to cling to such a dying patient? Why would we invest ourselves in this world as if it will never pass away? God's Word will not pass away, says Jesus. So, why do we love this world more than we love the Word of God? We know what is coming, yet we tend to ignore the signs. We live as if this world will go on forever, and we cling to it more than we cling to the Word of God. Repent. Read the signs correctly and repent. We all must repent. And those who do not will be judged with the world.

And now hear this. We know what is coming, even though we do not know when. But here is our comfort and our hope. We also know the *who*. We do not know when, but we know who. We know that Jesus is the one who is coming. He comes as Judge for those who are of the world. But He comes as Redeemer for those who belong to Him.

And that's you! You are baptized into Christ. He claims you for Himself. More, He forgives you. All your sins He forgives. Even the sin of loving this world too much. Jesus loves to forgive. And He does. He forgives all of you.

This is why He says to raise your heads. When the *what* comes, and causes those who are of the world to be in dread, Jesus comforts you with these words, "*When you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*"

It's because you know who is coming. It's your Lord who loves you who is coming. It's your Savior who gave Himself up for you on the tree of the cross who is coming. He shed His blood for you so that you need not be afraid of what is coming in the end. Because He who will come in the end is He who comes to you now. Here in His Sacrament, He comes to you now. He comes with His body and blood for you to raise your head; to lift you out of your sins; to give you assurance, so that now, and in the end, you have the comfort that your salvation is certain.

Jesus lowered His head in death on the cross so that you can raise your head with hope. Do not fear, neither the end of your life nor the end of this world. Jesus, who redeemed you from your sin by His blood will redeem you and deliver you from what is coming in the end. Amen.