

Mark 13-1-13

There's one in every crowd...a spoil sport, a party pooper. In our text it was Jesus. *"Look Teacher,"* someone exclaimed, *"Do you see these great buildings!"* The temple in Jerusalem was built out of massive stones. Marble white, each stone was twelve feet high, twenty feet wide, and forty one feet long. It was considered to be one of the wonders of the world. But rather than say something like, "Yes, it is amazing, isn't it?" Jesus brought the conversation to an abrupt halt with the words, *"Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* No Kodak moment. No sitting down for a picnic lunch beside the beautiful temple buildings. The thrill was over. "Everything you see," said Jesus, "Will be completely destroyed."

Maybe we're thinking that Jesus would not be one we would enjoy having along on a sightseeing vacation. "Look at the Grand Canyon, Jesus, isn't it impressive!" "Do you see this crack in the ground? It will be destroyed by fire in the end." "Look at the Rocky Mountains, Jesus, simply amazing!" "Do you see these mountains? They will vanish with all the earth in the end."

But it's not that Jesus does not want us to enjoy the wonders of God's creation. He was not raining on the disciples' parade at the temple. It was a teaching moment, not a Kodak one. It was time to point out the devastation that was coming, to warn them, to prepare them. And that is why this text is before us today. God is not trying to dampen our spirits as we enter into the Thanksgiving Day holiday. Rather, He is like the weather forecaster warning residents to prepare for Hurricane Sandy. He is like the tornado siren that sounds off before devastation strikes. How angry, to the point of lawsuits, people become when they are not warned about approaching disasters. Not everyone heeds the warnings that are given, but those that do are thankful that they had time to prepare.

Now it's interesting that when four disciples approached Jesus in private to ask, *"When will these things be, and what will be the sign?"* He did not answer their questions. He did not say when or what sign. Instead, He spoke about what was important for them to know, and for us. The first words He speaks should capture the attention of all of us. *"See that no one leads you astray."* Someone said once that *"All men have an affinity for religious error."* It's not just that all are weak and capable of falling into error; we have an affinity for it. We have a natural tendency to embrace error. By nature we like to believe and accept, not the truth of God, but that which is wrong and false. If this is our affinity, our natural tendency, then none of us should think that we do not need to heed Jesus' warning.

False Christ's, false prophets will come. They did not come before Jesus, but after His ascension they have come, and they have been successful. Most people in the world are following a false prophet...Muslims, Mormons...even for us who are Christians we have the natural tendency to follow the false prophet who lurks within our own heart. We deceive ourselves. We doubt the truth of the Christian Faith. We convince ourselves that we're not the terrible sinners others are, even though God's truth says we are. We convince ourselves that we do not need Jesus--His Word and Sacraments--all that much, even though God says otherwise. *"See that no one leads you astray,"* our Lord says. It's so easy to follow a lie, especially when the lie comes from within us.

When Jesus warned the disciples, He did not give times and dates. He said wars will come, earthquakes, famines--the birth pangs which announce to all who will listen that it is time to repent, for the end, though maybe not immediate, is in sight. This world is dying. It's in its death throes. It will not last forever even if all the people of the word were to join hands. Even if we were to elect the best leaders and eradicate immorality from our society, we would not save the world.

Our world will not come to an end through an earthquake, or a flood, a hurricane, or a world-wide nuclear war. Yet, all of these horrific disasters are pointing to the end. Just as an illness that lays us flat in our bed reminds us that one day we will be laid flat in a grave, so wars, and rumors of war, earthquakes, famines, and the like serve to remind us that this world will pass away with everything in it.

But not the church. Jesus' church will survive even though it will come under attack from without, by those who hate the Word of God and who hate Christians who love the Word, and from within, by those who pose as Christians, but who are used by the devil to hinder the proclamation of God's Word. In our text Jesus forewarns His disciples that because He was hated, and persecuted, and crucified, we who follow Him should not expect to be loved by the world. Because the time is short, the devil is working as hard as he can to attack Jesus' disciples so that more and more of us who love the Lord, back away from that love and become people of the world more than people of the church, of the Lord.

And so Jesus' last words are these, "*The one who endures to the end will be saved.*" He doesn't say, "The one who is strong to the end," He says, "*The one who endures to the end.*" Thirty-six years ago the movie, *Rocky* took the world by storm. It won the Best Picture in 1976. It told the story of Rocky Balboa who got a chance to box the heavyweight champion of the world, Apollo Creed. The fight was brutal. Time and again Rocky was knocked to the floor of the ring. He was bruised, beaten, bloody. One of his eyes was swollen shut. He was not strong in the end; he was exhausted. He was not the picture of health; he was ready to enter the ICU at the hospital. But he made it through the fight. He endured.

That is what we must do as Christians. The fight is long and fierce. The temptation to quit is ever-present...the temptation to stop being faithful, to neglect God's Word and Sacraments, to listen to the false prophet within our heart. It doesn't help when we see Christians on all sides throwing in the towel. Those who used to be strong are now weak and giving up. But friend, Jesus did not endure the cross for you so that you would quit on Him. He did not suffer and die for you so that you would walk away from His church in anger or in apathy. Jesus fought for you against all your enemies, and He won. He conquered your sin. He was declared guilty for you. You are declared innocent. God forgives you. Jesus defeated Satan, and through Holy Baptism He lives in you to fight the devil for you; to help you resist his temptations. Jesus overcame the world. When the world persecutes you, Jesus reminds you that this world is passing away. A new and better world in heaven awaits you. When the world hates you, Jesus reminds you that you are loved by God, and His love is greater than the world's hatred.

Jesus endured to the end for you. So you have a Savior who helps you endure. He does not tell us in our text, "The one who has never been knocked down will be saved," but "*The one who endures.*" Like Rocky, we fall down all the time. Our sins lay us flat. The devil tempts us and we give in to the world's charms. We're a mess. We're weak. But you will endure because Jesus keeps lifting you up. He draws you here to His house of mercy and He keeps forgiving you. He keeps feeding you His body and blood to strengthen you one more day, one more week.

"*He who endures to the end.*" You and I may not waltz into heaven. It's more like we'll be carried there on a stretcher by Jesus...bruised, beaten, exhausted...because we're in the fight of our lives and no Christian comes through unscathed. But Jesus is for you. He's on your side. He fought for you, and He fights alongside of you. Lean on Him. Fall into His arms. They are strong, and they are always full

of mercy and forgiveness for you. That's how you, my friends, it's how you will endure to the end--
through Jesus. Amen.