

Mark 13:1-13

I think that all of us pay attention to road signs: stop signs, yield signs, even road construction signs. We don't much care for these - those orange signs warning us that work is being done on the road ahead. They slow us down; sometimes to a crawl; sometimes to a complete stop. When driving along, as we see an orange sign, we may instinctively let up just a bit on the gas pedal. Especially when we see two or three close together. "Road Construction Ahead" says the first one. This is followed by "One-lane Road Ahead." And then comes "Flagman ahead - Prepare to Stop." We sigh a little, let off more on the gas pedal, take a look at the clock, and prepare for a line of cars to be stopped up ahead in our lane.

But then it may happen that as we keep driving, we see no construction crews. Half a mile, one mile, two miles - still nothing. We occasionally see an orange sign that says "Construction Ahead," but we don't see the actual construction. So you know what you do...the same thing I do...we up our speed. Maybe a little at first. But with each passing mile we go faster and faster, until we're back to the same speed we were going before we entered the construction zone.

Not only do we speed up, we become less focused. By now we safely assume that the signs are in error. Perhaps the road crews haven't arrived yet. Maybe they're on lunch break. Maybe their work is done, but they haven't taken the signs down yet. We dismiss these thoughts, turn the radio back on, and relax ourself in our seat. But then we come up over a rise, and there it is - a line of cars dead ahead of us, stopped in our lane, and there is no time to slow down. There is no escape.

Friends, this sermon is not being preached today for the purpose of making us better drivers. You don't need the church for that. The message in our text today is to prepare us for what's ahead, not on the road, but in life.

We've been seeing the orange warning signs for quite some time. Some of you for seventy, eighty, or ninety years. Those orange signs pop up every now and then as an earthquake ravages an entire region of the world. Some of you saw the orange warning signs of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Who of us can forget the orange warning sign that was posted on 9/11? Another one came Friday as terrorists killed nearly 200 people in Paris. Flooding, famines, tornados, wind-swept fires that engulf whole villages - God makes sure that you and I keep seeing the orange warning signs. The road ahead is closed they tell us. This world will end. We will not continue rolling along. Sooner or later we will meet up with the construction crew. The orange signs are there; they do not lie.

But where is the road crew? We see the orange signs, but we do not see the flagman in our lane. So we up our speed. We lose our focus. We don't forget what we were taught back in Catechism Class; we just take our eyes more off the road and put them more on all the stuff in our life.

There is a lot of stuff in our life, isn't there? Working hard to pay the bills, relaxing after work, hunting, fishing, keeping our home looking nice, preparing for the holidays. There's always something in our life that can easily take our eyes off the road - off God's word; that can cause us to become distracted and dismiss the orange warning signs God keeps posting.

But the flagman is there. Every single day thousands come up over the rise, and there he is, standing dead ahead of them in their lane. A sudden heart attack, a massive stroke, a car crash, a fatal accident on the job. When the flagman is standing in your lane, there is no escape. And we all must meet him. He could be on a nice, flat stretch of road so we have time to slow down and prepare. But don't count on it.

For so many the flagman with his construction crew is just over the rise. And unless we are always prepared, we will not survive. We will perish.

We all need to check our speed this morning. Has your life been speeding up to the point where you are going too fast for what is really important? Is time in God's House and at His Table of Grace not just a priority, but the priority? Is time in His Word something that you set aside for every day? Or has your life been going too fast for these things?

You and I need to hear the last words of Jesus in our text: "*The one,*" He says, "*who endures to the end will be saved.*" Not the one who starts. The one who endures to the end; to that point over the rise where the flagman is standing.

The bad news for us is that it is not our nature to endure...not to the end. You and I, by nature, are easily distracted with the stuff in life. It is our nature to neglect the Word of God, to make excuses, to justify why we cannot make it to God's House; why we don't need to be there regularly, why we do not have time to be in His Word. It is not our nature to endure to the end. It is, rather, our nature to speed past all the orange signs that God keeps placing before us.

He places those signs for us out of love. I don't think MODOT necessarily loves us. It's not love that causes them to post their orange signs. But for God, everything He does for you is done out of a heart that loves you. If you're going too fast down the highway, a crew member will yell at you to slow down. So does God. He needs to rebuke us from time to time through the mouths of His servants because we are going too fast. See it as love, however; not as anger. He doesn't want you to crash and burn. He loves you too much.

That's why He keeps posting another sign, along with the orange ones, all along the road. When driving along the highway, now and then we see a cross posted where someone was killed in a car wreck. For you, the One who was killed is Jesus. And God places the sign of His cross at every turn, every hill, at every corner of your life.

Jesus did endure to the end. He gave no excuses. He entered the construction zone for you. He walked the agonizing road to Calvary. He was hung on a cross as a sign for all - God's sign that all sinners should believe in Him because Jesus died there for all, for you.

Out of mercy, God keeps placing that sign of the cross all along your road in life. He places your Baptism into Christ for you as a sign, one that He wants you to see every day. You belong to Jesus in those waters. He declares you His child. His word for you is one of pardon and peace. He forgives you. In His House, He gives you the gift of life. He is the road upon which you travel. There is no need to fear. He is with you. And when the flagman is standing in your lane, although the road may end here for you, it continues into heaven because Jesus is that road. And in the Sacrament on the altar, Jesus places the sign of His cross there for you to assure you that your sins are forgiven because He bore them for you.

We're not so good at enduring. That's why God keeps calling you and me back to faithfulness with the sign of Jesus' cross. It's a call of mercy and love. And through His call, He slows you down; He keeps your focus not on the stuff in your life, but on the road, on His Word of life, on Christ Jesus.

One day you and I will meet up with the flagman. But because you live in Christ, and His words live in you, you will be prepared. You will endure to the end. Amen.