

Mark 13:1-13

I wonder if Al and Jill are having second thoughts about moving to California. It's not as if the entire state is on fire, but smoke from the fires is pretty much everywhere. We are amazed in a sad way as we hear reports of death and massive destruction. "Why is this happening?" There are many asking this question. Yet as we listen to Jesus in our text, we understand that disasters such as these California wildfires have been taking place, and will continue as long as the world stands.

He calls such things birth pains. Well judging by all the catastrophes taking place in recent history alone, the baby that is growing must be enormous. And it is. Before Christ comes again on Judgment Day, the world will fill up with wickedness. Some of it Jesus describes in our text. And when it is fully with this evil child, ready to give birth, the end will come.

But we do not know the due date. Nor are we to speculate. The disciples asked Jesus "When..?" in our text. But He gave them no answer. Instead He told them to be on guard; to focus, prepare, be ready. His final words in our text are quite sobering: "*The one who endures to the end will be saved.*"

Now we do not associate that word *endure* with things that are pleasant. "I endured that bowl of ice cream." We don't hear that. "We endured thirty years of married life." Hmm, maybe they mean to say, "We enjoyed these thirty years." To endure is to tolerate; to suffer without giving up; to bear up under a difficult burden.

Are there Christians who endure going to weekly church services for years on end? I suppose so. But hopefully they are able to say with the psalmist, "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'*"

This is partly what Jesus means when He says, "*The one who endures to the end will be saved.*" We cannot endure on our own. We endure as we abide in Christ. Understand this...here in God's house where we gather together around Christ in Word and Sacrament confessing our sins, receiving His forgiveness, hearing His words of life, eating and drinking His Sacrament...this is where we abide in Christ in a way that nothing else can touch. To lose this; to replace our abiding with Him here in His house with something that we deem more important is not the mark of the one who endures to the end.

And many of you get this. So whether you enjoy coming to church or endure it, you are here faithfully. This is a gift of God. You are making sure of your salvation, for He is at work in you.

But what about when things get difficult? Satan wants no one to endure to the end. And we see him at work. People who endured for a while but then quit. A word was said perhaps. Offense was taken. A relationship fell apart. Something happened within the life of one who was enduring, and Satan jumped at the chance.

This is why Jesus does not say, "The one who enjoys to the end will be saved," but "*the one who endures...*" It's easy to be a Christian when there are no challenges. But that's not how life is.

The world is filling up with evil. And this evil touches us where we live, work, and play. This evil dwells even in our own hearts. It was easy to be a resident of Paradise, California when everything was calm and peaceful. But then the fire came. How can one endure under fire?

Jesus did. He never quit on you. Yes, on you. Do you think He went to the cross for His own sake? He went there for yours and mine. He endured the fire of God's wrath. But we can say that He enjoyed it. In the book of Hebrews we're told that *for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross*. Where's the joy in crucifixion? His joy over you. Jesus suffered joyfully. He died with joy in His heart. Because He suffered and died for you.

And He brings you into His joy by abiding with you and you with Him. We cannot speak of abiding in Christ unless we speak of our baptism. You joined Christ there in that water. You abide with Him, and He with you, as you live in your baptism.

This is what California needs: water. Water puts the fires out. And also for us. How can we remain and abide in Christ when things are difficult, when all the evil things in the world come at us like a raging fire? Stay in the water. Do not stray from your baptism. Go back into it day after day, calling it to mind with the sign of the cross. In your baptism you are safe from the fires, even from the fires of Judgment Day. Because Christ is in that water, and with Him you are safe.

Keep in mind that Jesus does not say, "The one who is strong to the end will be saved." Nor does He say, "The one who has never been tripped up by sin will be saved." He says, "*The one who endures to the end will be saved.*"

To endure with Christ does not mean you will never fall when tempted; that you will never be weakened in faith. To endure is not so much about you, but about Jesus. It's not so much about what you do, but what Jesus does for you and in you. He is the strong one, not you. He is the one with perfect faith, not you. Even when you want to quit on Him, He does not quit on you. He is always in your baptism for you. He is always in the bread and wine of the Sacrament for you. He is always here in His words to you. And He always, always forgives you. It doesn't matter how sinful your life has been. He forgives you.

And this is why you want to endure to the end. Because God is wonderful and gracious. He is pure love. Where punishment is called for, He forgives instead. You want to endure to the end no matter how fierce are the fires, no matter how much evil is thrown at you, because it will be pure joy for you to be with your gracious God forever in heaven.

And you will be. Not by giving up, but by enduring. And you will endure to the end because you have a gracious God; a forgiving God; a God in whom you will abide to the end. Amen.