

“Ready for the End”

Jude 20-25

November 25, 2012

Last Sunday in the Church Year

Getting close to a deadline can be both a worrisome and frightening experience. Whether it is completing a project at work, finishing a paper or homework project at school, or getting the house cleaned in time for holiday visitors, the deadline associated with these things can cause us to worry that we don't know everything that needs to be done in order to meet the requirements and the deadline can cause us to be frightened that we will not have completed all those requirements in time.

On the Last Sunday of the church year we turn our attention toward the greatest deadline of all time: the end of the world. This deadline (if we take it seriously and I fear that we don't) may cause us great worry and fear. We have heard the exhortations of Jesus in our Gospel reading today to "be on guard!", and "stay awake!" We may worry that we are not truly ready for His return in glory for judgment. We have heard Jesus also speak of the signs of the end times: wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, celestial chaos, and so on. We may be afraid of the end of the world when we consider those cataclysmic events which have been foretold.

However, as worry and fear never help you meet any deadline at school, at work, or in the home, neither will they help us be ready for the end of all things. What is the answer then? Jude, who was most likely the half brother of our Lord Jesus, has a lot to say in his short epistle of only 25 verses about being ready for the end of the world. The main problem, according to Jude is not the greater evil that will fill the world near the end or the spectacular signs that will accompany the end. Jude warns his readers of people who will come in the end times who scoff at the truth, cause division among Christians, and who live immoral lives contrary to the will of God. He says prior to our text, "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit." It is these people and

their false teaching which Jude sees as the most serious problem. Why? False teaching and incorrect belief can lead us away from Christ and eternal life to Satan and eternal death. For that danger, we need to be ready. But how?

First of all, Jude writes, "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Here, Jude is referring to the content of our faith - that which we believe. Remember that Satan's primary temptation to Eve was not, "Eat some of the forbidden fruit!", but "Did God really say you shall not eat....?" Through the mouths of scoffers and doubters, Satan still leads us into sin, not by advocating that we do some heinous sin, but by causing us to doubt the truth of God's Word. "Did God really say...?" is still an effective way to lure someone into sin because, after doubting what God says, it is easier to sin against it. For you to be built up in your faith, you need to be in the Word of God: hearing it being preached, listening to it being taught, and reading it on your own. Praying for the Spirit's help as you hear, learn, and read God's Word will build up your faith. The same Spirit who inspired the Word of God to be written will also teach you its content and meaning so that you will not be deceived into sin.

Secondly, Jude writes, "Keep yourselves in God's love." It is not only the *knowledge* of our faith that is necessary but also the *practice* of that faith, as well. "To keep oneself in God's love is to stay where God can love us as his children and can shower upon us all the gifts of love that he has for those who are his children." (Lenski, p.646) Where does God give His gifts? Here in the Divine Service where God serves us. He gives comfort for consciences troubled by sin through the speaking of His absolution - i.e. the forgiveness of sin. He gives us assurance and strength to weak souls by giving Himself to us in the Lord's Supper. By being here regularly where God's love is and where His gifts of love are distributed, you will be strengthened and ready to face the end.

Thirdly, Jude writes, "wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." We don't wait in fear of the judgment day with its condemnation of evil and sin. For we know that all of our sin was paid for by Jesus on the cross and condemned there. Therefore, we wait in eager

anticipation for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to take us to eternal life, not eternal condemnation. With that attitude of waiting for mercy, rather than fearing condemnation, we will be ready to face the end.

But what about the people around us? What, if anything, do we do about them? When Cain was asked by the Lord where his brother, Abel, was, Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The fact of the matter is that you *are* your brother's keeper. In the holy Christian Church, we are not merely members of an organization, but a family of brothers and sisters in Christ. Life in Christ is not just a "you and me, Jesus" type of relationship. We do not leave people to fend for themselves spiritually. We are responsible for one another. We have an obligation to not only prepare ourselves for the end, but also to help those around us be ready for the end. After Jude has told us what we are to do to prepare ourselves to deal with the scoffers and false teachers of the end times, he tells us how to deal with those brothers and sisters in Christ who have been injured by the scoffers and false teachers.

First, he says, "Be merciful to those who doubt;" Some people, when influenced by the teaching of this age, begin to doubt what they have learned from God's Word. This doubting will show up in their words and actions. They may begin to question what the Word of God says and advocate positions contrary to the Word of God. They may begin to absent themselves from worship and join in the lifestyles of this coming age. It is very tempting for us to condemn and reject such doubters, all the while praising ourselves for being so faithful. But such a "holier-than-thou" attitude might drive them over the edge to complete unbelief. Rather, we are to be merciful to them. This doesn't mean accepting or condoning their false beliefs or behavior. We are to continue to show them the love and mercy which we ourselves have received from God through our Lord Jesus Christ and patiently encourage them with the truth so that they may not leave Christ, but be ready for His return.

Some people are past the stage of doubting and questioning. They have fallen away from the faith and, thus, are on the very brink of hell. They no longer doubt the truth, but reject it. They no longer miss worship occasionally and indulge in some of the sins of the flesh. They have stopped worshiping God altogether and are enmeshed in the sinful lifestyle of the world. There are people whose names are written on the membership roster of this congregation who would fall in this category.

Of these people, Jude says, "snatch others from the fire and save them." If any of you have been involved in saving someone from a literal fire, I'm sure it isn't easy. It is not a time to be delicate in moving someone, but to be very blunt -- to snatch them and run. Spiritually speaking, we have to do the same. To those who are teetering on the brink of hell, we need to be blunt. We cannot pussy foot around so that they "like" us. We have to confront them with God's Word that shows them their sin and be very blunt in calling it sin. We have to warn them of its consequences in no uncertain terms. We have to be equally blunt in sharing the Good News of God's full and complete forgiveness for their sin through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for that sin and the hope of eternal life through His resurrection. By doing this, the Spirit of God has an opportunity to work and some will be snatched from the fire and saved.

Some may passively ignore our attempts to "snatch them from the fire." Others may become confrontational, antagonistic, or mean-spirited towards us, despite our best attempts to show Christ's love. Of them, Jude says, "to others show mercy, mixed with fear --hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." We are to show them mercy – Christ's mercy – but we are to do it with fear. They do not just disagree with us in some spiritual debate. The clothing of their spiritual lives is stained by corrupted flesh. Without repentance and cleansing, they remain lost. Our mercy is accompanied with fear because it is so easy to accept, rationalize, or justify their behavior out of misguided pity for them that we become stained with it as well. We need to be fearful when dealing with such people so that this does not happen. While we need to love the sinner intensely, we must

retain an abhorrence and hatred of their sin so that we do not become infected with the disease for which we are endeavoring to share the cure.

All of this seems like a tall order: building ourselves up in faith and keeping ourselves in God's love while, at the same time, attempting to do the same for others. It *is* a tall order, one that we cannot do on our own. Jude recognizes this in his closing doxology:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, now and forever!
Amen.

It is God and God alone who will keep you from falling, not you and not your efforts. He is the one who saved you by His grace in the first place. He is the one who will keep you there. While it is up to you to immerse yourself in God's Word, it is God who will build up the faith within you. While it is up to you keep yourself in God's love by being present where His love is shared, it is God who will share that love with you through His Word and Sacrament.

It is God and God alone who will present you and every Christian before His presence without fault. While it is up to you be merciful to the doubting, blunt with the sinful, and earnest in your presentation of the Gospel, it is God who will turn people from sin to repentance and from doubting to faith. You are not responsible for the results.

The deadline of all deadlines - the end of the world - *is* coming. But you don't have to worry or fear. God has prepared you for this deadline through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. He gives you the means here by which you can keep yourself ready for that deadline. He gives you the opportunity and responsibility to help others within His Church to be ready for the deadline. And He will bring you and all of His people through that deadline successfully to life eternal with Him. As Jude closes out our text and his epistle, we also say, "to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, now and forever! Amen."

