

Twenty Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 28, November 18, 2007, Year C

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Luke 21:5-19

"The choice is yours – Know peace – or No peace"

Today we are surrounded by uncertainties – we have

- The War in Iraq, all eyes are on North Korea, and now Iran and Pakistan.
- There is drought in the south eastern part of this country, in Africa, North Korea, and parts of China.
- People are starving in – Africa, North Korea – and the ever present poverty in Appalachia.
- There are terrorist threats here in the US, in Europe, the Middle East, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- And how about uncertain economic times – the stock market's up's and down's, the price of gasoline, the price of heating fuel, wage cuts, lay-offs, higher taxes, the value of the dollar – especially against the Canadian.

So let me ask you this question: **How is your peace?**

All of these uncertainties can lead to a shaking of your inner peace.

People are looking for some assurance, some peace of mind that they can hold on to.

• When people feel 'out of control' they get angry easily, they do things so they can feel in control – like fire the helper. PEACE OF MIND IS SHAKEN – THESE ARE UNCERTAIN TIMES. Is your peace shaken? What do we do?

Jesus had something to say to his disciples about the uncertain and troubling times that would come to them, and I wholeheartedly believe that it can apply to us now.

People saw security in the temple. To them it guaranteed the presence and protection of Almighty God. But Jesus says NO! The temple will be destroyed.

Where is our security?

- Is it in the temple OR the God of the temple?
- Is our security in this building – or in the One we worship in it – the Lord of All?

Jesus warned that in difficult times there would be deceivers who would be declaring themselves to be 'the Christ' the Messiah. In our own recent history we can read of and remember people like

- The Rev. Sung Myung Moon who declared himself to be divine – and held marriages of hundreds – designed by himself. People gave all their savings to this mere man.
- There was Jimmy Jones, the founder of the "People's Temple" and their mass suicide by drinking "kool-aide" in 1978.
- Let's not forget David Koresh – and the "Branch Davidians" who went to their death in the stand-off near Waco, Texas in 1993.
- And today we hear of Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda who is not your typical minister. De Jesus, or "Daddy" as his thousands of followers call him, does not merely pray to God: **He says he is God.** He told a CNN interview in February of this year "The spirit that is in me is the same spirit that was in Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said for us **to watch out - to be aware** – that the time is coming – that many will come in His name – and **then** there would come:

Twenty Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 28, November 18, 2007, Year C

- Wars
- Earthquakes
- Famines
- Fearful events and great signs

But before these happen, there will be:

- Persecution
- Trials

Jesus says that the faithful will need to be witnesses of His. He further cautions you to make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourself. He said: *“For I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”*

(Luke 21:15) Whatever the trial – whatever the circumstance – Jesus has got us covered.

When the time of trial comes – those faithful in Christ will be given the words to speak the truth – **the truth that no one will be able to deny – that Jesus Christ is Lord – “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”** (John 14:6) Our Savior is reminding us that He is the one who is our Peace – He is our Comfort, He is our Guide and our Protector. Belief in Him – and only in Him - means eternal life. My brothers and sisters in Christ – I pray that this will bring new and clearer meaning to the words from John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* Faith – belief in Him is everything and will conquer all things – even death. Jesus says in verse 19 *“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”* Plainly put - by standing firm you will gain life – life eternal in Christ Jesus. He is our peace – **He is our Rock** – that never wavers. Faith in Him should also be unwavering.

A ship was wrecked in a furious storm and the only survivor was a little boy who was swept by the waves onto a rock. He sat there all night long until, the next morning, when he was spotted and rescued. “Did you tremble while you were on the rock during the night?” someone later asked him. “Yes,” said the boy. “I trembled all night – but the rock didn’t!”

Our Gospel reading ends with verse 19 – but we need to look further into this chapter to really understand Jesus’ message – and how He promises to be our live saving Rock – that we can always cling to.

Jesus, our Rock and our Salvation tells us that when the times of the Gentiles is complete – **and we are now in the times of the Gentiles** – then certain signs will be evidence of His return. He said in

Luke 21:25-28 *“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

- Sun, moon and stars
- Because of the roar & fury of the sea - people will be afraid and won’t know what to do
- People will faint with fear

When these things begin to happen – Jesus tells us what to do, and how to prepare: He says: **“stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

Well, when the water is rising and it is full of hungry alligators - HOW DO WE ‘**stand up and raise our heads**’? I am sure we could fill a whiteboard with answers that come to your mind:

Twenty Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 28, November 18, 2007, Year C

- Do what is right
- Trust in Jesus
- Hold onto your faith – How? What does this mean?
- Sometimes FEAR overwhelms!

Jesus gives us a good idea of how we should be Kingdom focused – rather than earthly focused. Call it if you will – the “big picture” for all eternity.

We need to be careful! Don’t be distracted! Don’t spend your time feasting!

Don’t be too busy caught up with worldly things.

Don’t worry about what you will eat, or drink or wear!

Seek first the kingdom of God! **Seek a relationship with Jesus** – and be in conversation with Him – in prayer and most importantly – being in His Holy Word.

The Apostle Paul further explains how we are to prepare - in his letter to the Ephesians 5:15-20 *“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times, and for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

If the way you make yourself feel better is with “the stuff of this world” – being fearful and selfish, in a shop till you drop mode - you won’t be able to think straight! And when **the day** comes you won’t be ready!

We need to be ready – constantly! To be always on the watch! If today is the day – and now is the hour – are you ready to meet Him? Go ahead - answer honestly!

Ok – well that’s easier said than done. So, HOW?

The Apostle Peter said we should be *“leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”* (2 Peter 3:11-12) We ought to **LIVE HOLY AND GODLY LIVES!** Are we two different people – at church you are one way – and at home you are another. There might even be **a third** in there – when you are with your friends – your language and your actions are totally un-Godly. You know what? We need to be consistent Christians – 24/7 – yes, **even while driving the car.** You know what I am talking about – America likes to speak with its’ hands! We need to ask Jesus to help us to be more like Him – you’d be amazed.

As we look forward to the day of God, also known as the day of the Lord . . . that day will bring destruction of everything. That should not make us afraid - because Jesus, in keeping with his promise, will bring a new heaven and a new earth, the home where RIGHTEOUSNESS will reign - and **there will be no pain or death, or weeping and gnashing of teeth.** Since the very beginning – yes, all the way back to Genesis – God has been as good as His Word – He has always kept His promises – even when mankind could not hold up its’ end of the bargain.

Jesus tells us clearly and plainly what we must do. We are to be *“praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”* (Luke 21:36)

- That you may be able to escape all that is about to happen,

Twenty Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 28, November 18, 2007, Year C

• and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man – oh what a glorious thought – to Stand before Him – in His presence! Oh, how I look forward to that day – to see Him face to face. If we pray – we can know Him – and have the peace that surpasses all understanding – which can only be found in Him – in Jesus Christ. Fr. Ward had a sermon not too long ago in which he said – “know Jesus – Know Peace – No Jesus, no peace!” How utterly true – if you know Jesus – then you know His peace in the truth. If there is no Jesus in your life – then you can have no peace in your life – this world and the next!

The fisherman, Peter – who learned at the feet of the Master – and might be the one who learned more about discipline, love and forgiveness than *any of the Apostles* reminds us to “*be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.*” (1 Peter 4:7-8) Dear friends, the love of Jesus Christ is the answer – as we prepare during these “last days,” for it is through His love that we will only know peace – and it is that peace which will help us to endure all things – with our eyes on the prize – which is resting for all eternity in His loving presence. The choice is yours – You can know peace – through Jesus Christ – or know NO peace at all. Indeed – Jesus is the answer! The choice is yours.

In closing – I would like to leave you with the words from Paul’s 2nd letter to the Thessalonians: “*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.*” (2 Thessalonians 3:16)