



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 31, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

End Time 1: Reformation

First Lesson: [Daniel 3:16-28](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46

Second Lesson: [Revelation 14:6-7](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Mark 13:5-11](#)

The Word of God! It is the Core of Christianity! You Must Be on Your Guard

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours through the work of our Triune God. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

If you look at Page 7 in your Service Folder, there is a lie there. I forgot to go back and take off three words: of the Day. The Hymn of the Day for Reformation Sunday is NOT *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. But since we are singing three hymns and not four, and usually we would sing *A Mighty Fortress* AFTER the Sermon, and since we're not doing that, I moved it to where the Hymn of the Day usually is and I forgot to delete those three words. I apologize. I really thought if we didn't sing *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* on Reformation Sunday we would have people that would stomp out because that has to be carved in stone on Mount Sinai, right? In a Lutheran church, you HAVE to sing *A Mighty Fortress* on Reformation Sunday or else you have done something evil and wrong, right?

It's interesting. I did talk to someone about the hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* this past week. If we've been singing it our whole lives, we love it, we treasure it and it is a beautiful hymn written by Luther that expresses a lot of the truths that today's service focuses on, I'll grant you that most certainly. But what I found interesting is that way back when, after I graduated from the seminary, some of my classmates/friends were assigned to mission congregations. They went to mission congregations. Reformation comes along and they sing *A Mighty Fortress* because that's what you do. But they didn't take the time to teach it. They just assumed that since they had sung it all their lives everyone knows it.

It's not the easiest hymn in the world to sing if you've never sung it before. All those half notes and you hold different words at different times that are a lot tougher. If you don't know it, it's really kind of hard to sing. So they are all excited and they are the only ones singing in their mission church because the people couldn't sing it.

Do you ever notice that now when we're using the screens and we don't have the music in front of us and we get a hymn that isn't that familiar? Sometimes it's hard for us to sing it, especially if the timing is a little different like that. Do you ever notice it? You still always have a hymnal right in front of you. You can always open up the hymnal if you have that problem.

But one advantage that I really like when using the screens in worship is when we're singing a hymn that you don't like, it's really hard to slam the screen shut to let everyone know that God cannot be praised and His Word not proclaimed by this hymn that you don't like. I really don't miss listening to hymnals close loudly at hymns that we don't know.

It's just a truth that we like what we know, and we don't always know what we like. But in front of you this morning for the hymn that we sang in place of the Hymn of the Day is a visual reminder of the first two lines of the hymn. *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*: the medallion on the side of the altar. A trusty shield and weapon: the medallion that is on the other side of the altar—the shield with the cross on it and the sword, the sword of the Spirit in the cross. It's a visual reminder of what this hymn says right at its very start, and I think it's a lot along the lines of what Jesus was saying in what I read to you from Mark 13; that you need to be on your guard, which means you need to make God your fortress by being in that trusty shield and weapon, which is the Word of God, the core of Christianity. Jesus didn't use those exact words but I'm convinced that's in essence what He was talking about, to paraphrase it.

These words of Jesus come on Tuesday of Holy Week. He had entered on Palm Sunday. Monday we are not told of anything that He did. Tuesday He is in the temple, talking, teaching, observing, pointing out things to His disciples, and the disciples return the favor by pointing out the glory and the splendor of the temple. We are told some of the stones of the temple were 100 tons. We are told it was impressive and they are pointing it out and Jesus said to them, "Not a single one of these stones is going to be left on each other. It's all going to be destroyed." That's in the verses right before what I read to you.

So when they get somewhere off by themselves a little later, Peter, James and John take Jesus aside and ask Him, "Tell us what the signs are of what is going to happen when this place is going to be destroyed. What are the signs of this?" Jesus gives an answer that is a lot like a lot of the messages from God that prophets have given in the Old Testament. He answers in a way that is fulfilled short-term in the events of the

destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., when Titus conquered it. Long-term it points way ahead to the end of the world. He gives the signs that are going to be there for the destruction of Jerusalem but then also for the end of the world. One of the things that He says is that you have to be on your guard because there are going to be a lot of things that the devil is going to be using to try to separate you from your connection to Jesus; your trust that Jesus is the only way to heaven, that He lived and died in your place and heaven is yours through Him and through Him alone. There are going to be those that come in His name and say "I am he," claiming to be either the Messiah or representatives of God. The problem with a lot of them is going to be that they certainly aren't and they are teaching things are not what God had said.

When we start looking for our hope and our salvation in ourselves or in other people or in other things, we're not following the message from God. When you listen to Americans nowadays, sometimes I wonder if they think the only way the world is going to be delivered from destruction is if the political party they agree with gets voted into office. We seem to put our trust and our confidence NOT in our God but in political people we agree with at times. Anyone that is pointing you to anything else besides Jesus be on your guard against that because the core of Christianity is this message that Jesus lived and died in your place, that you do nothing to save yourselves. It's not by works. It's by faith alone. It's God's grace alone that put that faith in your heart and Scripture alone has the authority that tells us these things. So be on your guard. Recognize a false teacher.

The only way you're going to do that is if you know what the true teaching is. If you know what Scripture says and you continually learn it and reinforce it and grow more and more in it, you'll see the false teachers for what they are.

He also says there are going to be other things that are going to happen that will remind you that destruction is near. For us that would mean the end of the world. He talks about wars and rumors of wars, kingdom against kingdom, and people against people. He talks about earthquakes and famines. It's really hard to watch the news and not see some of those things every day. You can become so numb to them that if it's not where someone you know or love lives, you don't even think twice about it. *Oh, a stoning, an earthquake; great.* But what God is telling us is when you hear these things, even if your loved ones are not directly involved, you should use it as a reminder to be on your guard. This is a reminder that there is going to come a day when this world will be destroyed and people are either going to heaven or to hell, so are you on your guard? Are you still connected to Jesus? Do you still put your confidence for salvation in Christ alone? Are you drifting away from it? Are you getting caught up in other things? One of the things Jesus says in here again and again is to be on your guard. Recognize that this is coming and make sure you're staying close to Jesus.

In the fortress that is the Gospel we stand safe and we stand secure, even if we suffer and go through difficulty, until He takes us to heaven. The devil will come and tell you that suffering and that difficulty is evidence that either God doesn't love you or He is mad at you and He is punishing you for something. Did you notice what Jesus said to His disciples? That suffering and difficulty is something they should expect. It's going to come.

He gave them the marching orders. ***"...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)."*** A witness tells what they know to be true. They were to tell what they knew to be true about Jesus. Here is what Jesus says it is going to get them. "You will be persecuted and ***handed over to the local councils and flogged...***" If you don't know what "flogged" is, it's not a good thing. It means "beaten with a whip." This is what He says, "This is what you should expect when you live for me because not everyone welcomes the Gospel with open arms."

The devil can either use that to keep us quiet and keep us from talking about the good news about Jesus, or we can be on our guard and say "My God has promised He'll take care of me and there is no other way for anyone else in this world to get to heaven except through Jesus." So when I have the opportunity, I want to seize it and share Jesus with others.

For the disciples it meant for them in front of kings, councils and authorities. The Spirit gave them the words to speak as they proclaimed Christ is the only way to heaven. They did it faithfully. As far as we know, all of the original apostles, except for John, died a martyr's death. Others throughout history have stood before kings and councils and authorities and proclaimed the good news about Jesus and stood inside that fortress of God's Word and swung the sword of the Spirit, not only using the Word as a shield to protect them from those attacks of the devil but also the sword that leads us to go on the offensive against the devil. Luther stood before the emperor and said "Everything I've written is based on Scripture. If you can show me from Scripture where I'm wrong, I'll recant. I'll say I was wrong. Just show me from the Bible. But if you can't show me it from the Bible, I can't take any of it back because this is what God has said. We're saved by faith alone." It's not our works. It's not our effort. If it was, we'd NEVER know if we have done enough! But it's ALL the grace of God.

I don't think I've ever claimed verbal inspiration for Luther, but I think the Spirit spoke through Luther just like He would speak through us today. Luther's study of Scripture led him to focus entirely on Scripture. If it's in there, it's what God said. It doesn't matter what anyone else has said, what councils or other authorities have said, if it's not in Scripture, it's not true. What is in Scripture is true. If it goes against Scripture, it's not

true. So when he spoke, the Spirit gave him those words in the sense that he was breathing Scripture. He lived in Scripture. And when he spoke, it was natural for him to speak Scripture.

I think the same thing is true for us today. I'd never claim inspiration of the Holy Spirit for any of us, but I think if we spend our time growing in the Word, daily reading the Word, studying the Word and letting the Spirit fill our hearts and build our faith, when the time comes and the devil says to you, "Don't say anything. You might screw it up," we'll simply trust that God will guide us and that Word that we have studied will be spoken by us at the right time and the right place. I think that's how this passage also applies to us.

We can convince ourselves that we might screw it up so we better be quiet and change the subject and talk about something else. But if we're focused on Jesus as the only way to heaven, we understand that if the person is an unbeliever, they are going to hell. Even if we say something wrong, they aren't going to hell-er, they are still just going to hell. But God can work through halting words, stumbling words that you and I speak. He can work through that to comfort those who are facing incredible difficulties. He can work through that to give the gift of faith to those who don't yet know Jesus.

Just like we think everyone in the world is born knowing how to sing *A Mighty Fortress* as Lutherans, sometimes we think everyone else in the world has always heard about Jesus because we've heard about Him all our lives. They haven't! There are people out there that don't lay their head on the pillow with the confidence that you have! That God has taken away your sins and if you were to die before you wake, you know the Lord is going to take your soul to heaven because God has given you that gift of faith. People are living without that peace and that comfort and you have it! And God has asked you to share it!

Be on your guard. Make sure you are in that fortress. Make sure you're in that shield, but be on your guard and also make sure you are on the offensive, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others, because that's what God has called us to do. He has given us that authority because He has given us His authoritative Word. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.