

November 14, 2021

Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“His Weapon for You”

Daniel 12:1-3

Last week we observed the Feast of All Saints and Gospel good news was definitely the theme of the day. Today is the Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost and we're just shy of the end of the church year and, well, we've kind of switched gears just a bit.

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”

“A time of trouble” in Daniel's prophecy lines up perfectly with the “time of tribulation” in New Testament Revelation. This in and of itself is most certainly not good news.

Insulated here in the United States it's rather easy for us to not comprehend the immense suffering and dying for faith in Christ that happens in the world. We usually think of martyrdom as something that happened under the Romans in the first three centuries after Christ's ascension. But some of my professors at seminary claim that more Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than did in all 19 previous centuries of the Christian church combined! In many places around the world today Christians are persecuted and dying for their faith. In the civilized world belief in Christ and membership in churches has been on the wane for decades and the secular mainstream is getting pretty comfortable with openly calling us stupid lunatics.

Folks, we live in the time of tribulation Daniel speaks of. I leave open the possibility things may get way worse right before the second coming of Jesus because Scripture does seem to suggest that. But the time of trouble began with Jesus' ascension; it's just the time of the church in a world that rejected Jesus and rejects His church. And yet, there are some yahoos out there proclaiming that to love Jesus leads to a happy and prosperous life filled with rainbows and unicorns. And there are lots of folks in the mainstream and even Lutheran church who subscribe at least somewhat to such thinking.

The good news is we've got Michael, and archangel high-ranking in the Lord's army having charge of God's people. Don't really know a lot about Michael. In Hebrew his name is actually the question “Who is like God?” That good news, considering that's the question the Jews sang after crossing the Red Sea and the answer is pretty much “God is the awesome God that defeats all your enemies for you!” We know Michael is part of the angelic legion that defeats Satan in the middle of Revelation. And we're told rather clearly *“But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”* That's good news.

Yet what follows can leave us hanging. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*

We don't like hanging in the either/or of such judgment statements...probably because when we look at ourselves we know on which side of that judgment we should rightly fall. We prefer the all Gospel good news statements.

Ironically, though, one of our greatest struggles is to receive and dwell within those Gospel statements.

St. Michael is described in Scripture as a type of warrior angel. Warriors use weapons. And when Scripture describes a weapon associated with the divine and with the Gospel, what's the weapon? It's a sword! And what is that sword?

The author of Hebrews writes, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and*

discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” St. Paul in Ephesians describing the armor of God describes *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* In the beginning of Revelation when St. John first sees the vision of the Son of Man, what comes forth from His mouth, you know, from where His Word comes? *“From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.”*

God makes it pretty obvious what your best weapon is in the time of trouble. It’s the Word of God. It’s the Word of God that keeps pointing you toward Christ the Savior, Christ the crucified, Christ the risen, Christ the victorious king. The Word is what points you toward and leads you into those wonderful Gospel statements of forgiveness, life and salvation. The Word points you to the truth. I’m reaching a bit into the spiritual realms here, but I’d bet the sword the archangel Michael uses to defend God’s people is that same Word of God.

Yet how is it that we, God’s people, regard His Word?

Here in the Divine Service we probably regard it best—we like the Gospel proclaimed and of course we’re on our best behavior...trying to pay attention. But we’ve got our problems here. The liturgy is loaded with God’s Word, yet Christians folks describe it as too repetitive and boring. People whine about the length of a sermon and what’s that?—too much proclamation of God’s Word! And that’s on Sunday morning!

What’s going on the rest of the week? Are we keeping that sword sharp by daily going to God prayer and feeding off the Word in study and devotion? Are we protecting our families in the same; arming our children for their spiritual defense in an evil world by teaching them the truth? Or are we leaving that to the church to do on Sunday for a few minutes during the service followed up by some neat Bible stories devoid of any real context in Sunday school? Is confirmation class, a place kids that age really don’t want to be, the only deep, thoughtful theological encounter some Christians have in their lives? We must do better.

That’s not me talking. That’s Jesus. *“See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.”* If you don’t know the truth, abide in the truth, how easy is it to be led astray by a lie? And look around the world today—the lies are all over the place!

Jesus says to his disciples, *“But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”* That’s true for us also. But how can we expect to endure in faith against our adversaries if we don’t know the foundation of our faith in Christ through the Word He has given us? “Jesus loves me this I know” is good, sure. But if that’s all you got, it’s like going into battle with the Taliban alone carrying a .22-caliber revolver when you could be bringing the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army.

Folks, does any one of us want to take on Satan, the world and our own sinful self solo, when an Archangel wielding the sword of the Word of God can stand by our side? No.

And please don’t get me wrong. The Gospel is the Gospel. Jesus has done all necessary to secure our salvation. He gives that gift to us continually in Word and Sacrament. Your prayer, Bible study and devotions are not the work that saves you.

But Christ’s redemption is a gift received by faith and our faith in Christ is what the enemy wishes to destroy. If you aren’t in the Word that points to Christ, bolsters that faith and defends it like a sword, the tribulation in which we walk may wear that faith down and something else will take its place. That something else will then lead you astray. That’s not good news.

The good news is found in the Word. It is in God’s Word of promise in Christ in which we endure to the end and are saved. So brothers and sisters in Christ; walk with the Archangel Michael and keep asking, “Who is like God?” and daily find and abide in the Gospel answer in the two edged sword of God’s Word revealed to you, for you.

Amen.