

John 14:18-21

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Acts 17:16-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

It Will Happen!

May 17, 2020

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Sirius satellite radio has been encouraging people (at least on the 60's on 6 that I listen to) to call, email or write with their requested “feel good” song, as a way of encouraging one another through the days of isolation in our COVID pandemic. When I listened to a countdown of the top 60 feel good songs, there were some that I couldn't see being on that list. Some of those songs had rather sad messages of lost love, infidelity and heartbreak. I'm sure I even heard the Skeeter Davis song, “The End of the World” as someone's feel good song. That's one I couldn't understand, since the song asks several times, “Don't they know it's the end of the world?” I know the song is about lost love, but I also know that people are asking that question. I've been asked several times whether our present COVID crisis could be the beginning of the end of the world. My children have wondered about it, too. After all, when we look at the things that are happening all around us, it does seem that the world is in trouble. A cartoon in the *Calgary Sun* summed up 2020 in this way: “A self-isolated, jobless Canadian in a COVID mask, attacked by murder hornets, while shovelling snow in May.” Just think: we have plague, we have insects, we have nature in an uproar. Don't they know it's the end of the world?

While this is the first time most of us have faced these kinds of things, this isn't the first time our world has dealt with similar fears and crisis. Generation after generation have wondered about the end of the world. They have had to deal with plagues. Drought, locusts and other disasters have destroyed crops on levels we typically can't comprehend in our day and age. War has ravaged nations, including those we know as *world wars*. Nature has had its ups and downs, too. Now none of this should surprise us. Jesus spoke of these things as signs of the end of the world when the disciples asked: *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”* And Jesus began to say to them, *“See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* (Mark 13:3-8, ESV)

Is it the end of the world? I remember back in 1987 that I received a little booklet from some religious group that was entitled, *“Eighty-Seven Reasons Why the World Will End in 1987”*. Of course, 1987 came and went. Yet it wasn't too long after that I got another booklet: *“Eighty-Eight Reasons Why the World Will End in 1988”*. Or we can think of Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who had calculated that the rapture would happen in 1878. In more recent times, Harold Camping promoted the idea that the world would end on May 21, 2011 at 6:00 pm, on what he said was the 7,000th anniversary of the Great Flood. The end would come through a great earthquake that would be far beyond anything ever experienced in our world. As I understand it, the earthquake would have gone through each time zone at 6:00 p.m., ushering in the end of the world.

But now it is 2020. And, yes, the question still comes up. Is the end at hand? Will all that is happening bring our world to its final conclusion? Is judgement day imminent?

I don't know if the world will end tomorrow, or a thousand years from now. In our first lesson today, Paul told the scholars and philosophers in the Areopagus that God *“has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”* (Acts 17:31, ESV) Yes, it will happen. The world will come to an end. But as the redeemed children of God, we look to that day in a very different way: we do it in light of the promises that Jesus makes us in our text.

This coming Thursday, the church will observe Ascension Day, remembering that our victorious, risen Lord has returned to His heavenly home, and that He rules over all things for the sake of His church. Jesus is looking to His ascension as He speaks with the disciples in the upper room before His crucifixion. In the events recorded for us in chapters 13-17 of John's gospel,

Jesus is comforting His disciples and preparing them for the hardest days they can imagine. It will only be a matter of hours before Jesus is arrested, falsely tried and crucified as He gives Himself for them and for all people, paying for the sins of the whole world through His sacrificial death on the cross. They will be thrown into confusion, grief and fear. But Jesus wants them to know that there is hope, even in their grief. He will be taken from them, but He will come to them again. He will destroy death and the grave as He rises again from the dead. He also assures them that when all is said and done, they will also be with Him in glory. He promises: ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*** (John 14:2-3, ESV)

Jesus also promises us: ***“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*** The day is coming when we will see Him again. The angels made that same promise to the disciples on the mount of ascension: ***“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*** (Acts 1:11, ESV)

Yes, it will happen. The day of the Lord will come. While there are those who wonder if we have come to the end of the world, there are even more who think the whole idea of the end of the world and a time of judgement is just nonsense and silly talk. Peter spoke of such people, even in his day, and said: ***[know] this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”*** (2 Peter 3:3-4 - ESV) The scoffers of our day say, “Once again, we heard all those doom and gloom predictions. But did it happen? No, because it’s not going to happen!”

Pity these people, my dear friends, for they are unaware of the truth of God around them. Pity a world that is blind to the signs that God has provided, which point to the day of His appearing. Pity those who think that they can go on any way they please. There is a day of judgement. God will bring all the nations before His presence. It will happen. But we look to that day, knowing what Jesus has said to us: ***“he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”***

Some years ago a tourist was travelling along the shores of Lake Como in Northern Italy. He really wanted to visit one castle called Villa Arconti. When the tourist reached the castle, a friendly old gardener opened the gate and showed the tourist the grounds, which this old man kept in perfect order. “How long have you been here?” the tourist asked. “Twenty-four years,” replied the gardener. “And how often has the owner of the castle been here during that time?” “Four times.” “When was he here the last time?” “Twelve years ago.” “Never since then?” “Never.” “Does he write to you?” “No.” “From whom then do you get your instructions?” “From his agent at Milan.” “Does this agent come out here quite often?” “Never.” “Who, then, comes here?” “I am almost always alone—only once in a great while a tourist comes here.” “But you keep this garden in such fine condition and take such excellent care of all the plants, just as though you expected your master to come tomorrow.” “No, I expect him today, sir, today,” the old gardener promptly replied.

I know we are all anxious for this COVID stuff to end. There is still a great deal of uncertainty as to what the days before us will bring. Thankfully we are seeing some signs of better days ahead. Jesus says there are even better days to come. While I cannot stand before you and tell you when the world will come to an end, God has assured us, through the resurrection of Christ that it will happen. The Lord will come again. In the meantime, we hear Jesus say: ***Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.*** We don’t need to worry about when the world will end. We just live in expectation, trusting God’s promises.

Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew the Lord would come tomorrow. He said, “I would go out and plant a tree.” Each and every day, we live under the grace of God. We don’t live in fear of the Lord’s appearing. We live in hope. We know that the Jesus who rose from the dead, and who has ascended to His glorious throne in heaven will come again. And when He does, what a great and wonderful day that will be! Amen.