

God is our refuge and strength. An ever present help in trouble. Amen.

13 As Jesus was leaving the temple courts, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look what impressive stones these are, and what impressive buildings!” ² Jesus said to him, “Do you see these large buildings? There will not be one stone here left on top of another. They will all be thrown down.” ³ As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled?”

⁵ Jesus began by telling them, “Be careful that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ “Whenever you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but the end is not yet. ⁸ In fact, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ But be on your guard! People will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues. You will stand in the presence of rulers and kings for my sake as a witness to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. ¹¹ Whenever they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand what you should say. Say whatever is given to you in that hour, because you will not be the ones speaking; instead it will be the Holy Spirit.

¹² “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father, his child. Children will rise up against their parents and put them to death. ¹³ You will be hated by everyone because of my name, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Friends,

As you listened to the lessons and our sermon text this morning you might have thought that there was a lot of judgment and destruction and not much joy. But there were glimmers of hope sprinkled throughout the readings. In the 1st lesson, God tells Jeremiah that if there is repentance then he won't bring judgment. The second lesson talks about the gospel going out to all nations and then we have our sermon text which talks about the last days.

As we consider the words of Jesus this morning, he reminds us that there will be many **“Challenging Times for Christians,”** but to take heart for there would be, **“No Triumph for False Christs,”** there would be, **“No Success for Ungodly Nations,”** and there would be, **“No Victory for Unbelieving Relatives.”**

I. This was not the 1st time Jesus warned against false prophets. Earlier in his ministry he had said, **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”** (Matthew 7:15). As we celebrate the Reformation, we are reminded that Martin Luther was dealing with some of those ferocious wolves in sheep’s clothing. The papacy has deceived many people throughout history by exalting themselves to have a great authority; even greater than God’s Word. Luther suffered greatly as he tried to live up to the official teaching of the Catholic Church; that you have to work your way to heaven. He always fell short. But then he received God’s grace; that forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus and that changed everything in his life. He was free from the guilt of his sins and this began a lifelong crusade to share the gospel message but it also began a lifelong battle against the pope and the teaching of work-righteousness.

The current pope is no better as he continues to uphold the teaching of work-righteousness but also makes controversial statements about how to get to heaven. At times he has given the impression that all people can get to heaven if they are good people and do good things, but that's not what scripture says.

The pope isn't the only false prophet deceiving people. The leader of the Mormon Church is deceiving many by claiming to be Christian while really focusing on good works as a way of salvation. Mohammed was another false prophet creating the false God Allah as he started the religion of Islam. These false religions deceive millions of people.

They are all focused on rules, commands and what you have to do to earn heaven or paradise or whatever they might call heaven. But these false religions and false prophets can't offer lasting peace or forgiveness for sins. Luther struggled for years with guilt because he always fell short of trying to pay for his own sins. Only God's Word and faith in what Jesus has done could bring him relief from his sin and guilt and only God's Word and faith in Jesus can bring us the very same relief from our guilt and sin.

We want to take Jesus' warning to heart because there are many false religions in our world and many false teachers. Some claim to be a type of Messiah and some just point to a false god but none of them have defeated our greatest enemy – Satan. Yet these false prophets and the false gods entice many into their fold. They may bring short term joy but in the end, they bring long term sadness and despair – in the end they can only bring everlasting condemnation

Only the cross can bring us salvation for the cross is where Christ defeated Satan by paying for our sins. When Jesus said, **“It is Finished.”** as he hung on the cross he was assuring us that our salvation is complete. He has done it all for us and His resurrection was God the Father's stamp of approval that our debt of sin has been paid in full. And so, like Martin Luther, we trust is Christ alone and all that he has done for us, to bring us forgiveness through the life-saving gift of faith. And we want to watch out for any false prophets that would try and deceive us.

Jesus continues by talking about more signs that will appear as we draw closer to the End Times.

II. Jesus continues by prophesying about wars and unrest. He also points to natural disasters like earthquakes and famines. He calls these the beginning of birth pains. As I read these words, I wonder if there has ever been a time of world peace? Maybe there have been very short periods but they didn't last very long. History shows us that there is always some kind of war or a rumor of war going on in our world.

And it seems like natural disasters are coming more and more frequently; not only earthquakes and famine but also fires, drought, floods, hurricanes and more. We might ask “Why?” but we know why. Ever since Adam and Eve brought sin into the world it has had an impact on this world as well as all mankind but there is hope.

Jesus said that this was the beginning of birth pains and with birth comes new life. These prophecies of Jesus have been fulfilled and will continue to be fulfilled throughout the New Testament era that we are in right now until they end with Judgment Day. And Judgment Day

will bring a new life for all believers in heaven. When will that be? Just as we cannot pinpoint the exact time a mother will give birth, so we cannot pinpoint the exact time of Judgment Day. It seems like all the signs are here that it is coming soon, but remember that God doesn't look at time in the same way we do. Peter tells us, **“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”** (2 Peter 3:8)

So what do we do? Jesus tells us to be on guard for we may face persecution but take every opportunity to share the Gospel. And look to the Holy Spirit to give you the words to speak. And in times like these hold onto God's Word.

Our Psalm for today, Psalm 46, reminds us that God is our refuge and strength; a help in any trouble. The psalmist also tells us, **“Be still and know that I am God.”** In other words, God is still in control and he will only allow this godlessness to continue for so long. And when we are feeling overwhelmed, look to the cross where we see God's great love for us and his power to pay for the sins of the world and for our sins. What a great reminder that God can take care of us in any trouble. And so the cross can lift us up from the despair of what is going on around us and help us keep Jesus at the center of our lives. The cross can bring us true peace through forgiveness and God's love. While we can have peace the world is becoming more and more divided, affecting all our relationships – even relationships in our own family.

III. Jesus continues by telling us, **“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father, his child. Children will rise up against their parents and put them to death. ¹³ You will be hated by everyone because of my name, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.”** This is one of the more disturbing parts of this prophecy and yet we see it unfolding every day. Families are divided over many issues including what God's Word says about different sins that society has tried to classify as normal.

Right now we are living in a divided country. Our government is divided and not working for the benefit of the people. Many schools in our country are teaching subjects that are divisive and pushing agendas that promote sin and sinful lifestyles. And dealing with the pandemic has become more about politics and money and power rather than about medicine and the best practices.

Jesus said that the one who endures to the end will be saved but how do we endure. So how do we endure? Start with the cross and God's love for us. Continue by studying God's Word so that you know his will for your life. Look to God's Word to guide you in life. And pay attention – attention to what your children and grandchildren are being taught in school, attention to what the different politicians stand for who are running for office and their track record, and what the scientists are really saying about this pandemic and then speak up if the opportunity arises.

Christ never promised that life would be easy and we can see that the world has been in turmoil for thousands of years and that Christians have had different challenges throughout history. Martin Luther had to deal with many troubles in his lifetime too. Wars and the threat of war was constant, the plague was a pandemic going through Europe at the time of his life and he was fighting against the Catholic church which was a world religion and a world power at the

time. But he stood firm on the Gospel and proclaimed God's Word every chance he had and he was content and happy because God was at the center of his life.

These are challenging times for Christians. There are many false gods all around us, there is so much unrest in our world and there are so many families that have been torn apart by sin and the influences of the world. But on this Reformation Sunday we can rejoice. We can rejoice because the Gospel has touched our hearts and we have been given the gift of faith. We can rejoice because we have been freed from the guilt of our sins – Jesus paid for all of them! We can rejoice because we know that God is in control and especially because we know that he is in control of our lives and will help us as will live for him.

So continue to talk to God in prayer. Continue to look to him for forgiveness. Continue to hear and study his Word and remember this is just the beginning of birth pains but we can look forward to a new life in heaven someday because of our faith in Jesus. Amen.