

Third Last Sunday 2024
Luke 10:20-30 (ESV)

Jesus said, “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed Third Last Sunday of the church year to all of you. As we wind down yet another election cycle and yet another liturgical year also comes to a close, I have to say, I think it’s very useful for us to have texts like that of our Gospel lesson for today set before us, which focus our attention on the close of the age.

Texts like these, dear ones, are very useful in helping us not to lose the forest for the trees. They help us in such a way that amid all the hustle and bustle of daily life, amid all the clamor and the noise, we would still be grounded and oriented the way we need to be as faithful Christians and so that we’re not caught off guard by the reality soon to come—by the fact that this world will soon come to an end, and that when it does, the truth about our Lord and our lives lived in relation to Him will be suddenly, unmistakably clear.

Our Lord Jesus says, “As the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in His day.”

And of course, when lightning flashes in a big storm, it’s startling and unexpected, but you don’t need an expert in meteorology to explain to you what you’re seeing. No one needs diagrams or flow charts or anything like that to know what’s taking place before your very eyes.

The bright, piercing light ripping through the heavens; the loud, booming roar shaking you to the core—there is no doubt about what’s happening right in front of you, about what it is and what it means. Suddenly, it all becomes quite clear to you. And so it will be on that day when our Lord returns.

So, pay no attention, then, to any TV preacher or “prophet” wannabe telling you that the Christ has returned and come to some obscure location, to some secret lair we should carefully search out. “Do not go out or follow them,” our Lord says. And don’t listen when people lay claim to knowing precisely when the end will come either. That day will come like a thief in the night, at an hour you do not expect. So to have someone tell you when that hour will be after the Lord Himself says nobody will know, well, you might as well be listening to a drunken fool claiming to know exactly where and when the lightning will strike.

They are frauds and charlatans who make such claims. They teach for shameful gain the things they ought not to teach because they love money and temporal things in this life more than the Lord. And if these people had any idea of what’s coming if they don’t repent, they would weep and wail because of their deceitful words. They would immediately renounce them and beg the Lord for forgiveness on their knees day and night.

They dare to speak words in God’s name that He’s not given them to speak—words which wander away from what He’s caused to be written in the holy Scriptures and thus lead

people to wander away from the Lord in turn. Such people are storing up unbearable wrath for themselves on the day when our Lord returns in glory. And as sudden and unmistakably clear as His second coming will be, so will the destruction be that He brings upon them and all others who are faithless and unfaithful to Him, like what happened in the days of old.

The Lord Jesus, in our text, brings up how it was in the days of Noah. “They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage,” He says. People were carrying on as they always have. They were completely engrossed in their own affairs; they were tending to this and now to that; they were living out normal, everyday life and almost everyone was swept up in thinking that God would always let it be that way...“until the day,” Christ says, “when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

Those people distracted themselves with willful ignorance of Noah’s preaching and they comforted themselves with false promises until the fountains of the great deep were opened and suddenly they were swept away in the flood waters and it became clear they were dead wrong. Suddenly it became all too clear they wanted to preserve their life in this world above all else because they loved life in this world above all else, above even the Lord and the salvation He freely gives, so they lost their life in this world and eternal life with Him.

And in today’s lesson, our Lord says the same about those who lived in Sodom in the days of Lot. They too “were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”

And if you’ve ever been even remotely close to a raging wildfire, for example, you seen a glimpse of how terrifying of an experience the destruction of Sodom must have been. When I was in college, my wife and I went to a wedding for a friend of ours near beautiful Santa Barbara, California. And everything was great until we found ourselves well removed but still just a little too close for comfort to a wildfire burning out of control in the foothills near the coast.

There were what looked like mountains of thick black smoke and ash that darkened the sky above us. We knew the sun was shining, but we had no idea where it was. The sky was darkened like nighttime when it was midday. The wind was howling. Sirens were wailing. And in the distance, we could see a wall of fire that must have been at least 30 feet tall in some parts. It looked like the mouth of hell was opening up before us.

And as I think back on that experience, I can’t help but say thank God that in His mercy, we weren’t over there being consumed with everything else in that fire. I also can’t help but think about the destruction of Sodom and what happened to Lot’s wife, and what will happen at the end of the age.

As Lot and those with him were being saved from the fiery destruction falling upon Sodom, his wife looked back, and she apparently looked with longing and ungodly love for her life there instead of the new life and salvation the Lord was bringing her into by His mercy. She

was in love with life in this present world and wanted to preserve her life in a place doomed to pass away.

And in light of these things, it'd be good for us to ask some very direct, soul-searching questions of ourselves, dear ones: are you in love with life in this present world? Would you look back and turn away from eternal life with the Lord to preserve your life here and now, knowing the world will burn when He returns?

Well, make no mistake, dear ones, the intentions of your heart will suddenly become clear in the day of the Lord.

And as if you didn't already know, here's what else will be suddenly, unmistakably clear: that the Lord is faithful to His promises, that all that is written about Him in the holy Scriptures is true, and that because He shed His blood for you and redeemed you and was raised from the dead for you, no destruction will fall on any one of you who repent and believe in Him.

Suddenly it will be clear that all you baptized faithful have died to yourselves and to life in this fallen world. And the new life given you in Christ, the crucified and risen One—this new life, you will keep. In fact, Christ now lives in you by faith—just like St. Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me.”

And in the day of our Lord's return, while all the wickedness and corruption of this world are being consumed in the fire of God's wrath, you will be caught up and gathered to the holy body of Jesus, which is to be caught up and gathered to the place of salvation. And I'll close with this.

It's what Jesus says after His disciples once again don't understand all that He's told them. “There will be two in one bed and one will be taken and the other left,” Jesus says. And when the disciples ask where? The Lord responds in this way: “Where the body [is], there the vultures will be gathered,” which is as much as for Him to say, “that too will suddenly become clear to you.”

Because just as we are gathered to the body of Jesus at this altar in the Lord's Supper for life and salvation, in this way we'll also be gathered and brought near to His glorious body in that day for the very same.

May God grant that until then, we would gladly die to the world and lose our lives every day for Christ's sake, and that when He appears in glory, suddenly the truth about our new life in Him and the salvation He's given us as a gift will all be unmistakably clear.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.