

Advent 1, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Luke 21.25 ff

A couple weeks ago, my sermon was based on the Gospel of Mark, chapter 13—Jesus and the disciples, sitting in front of the Temple in Jerusalem, “Oh Jesus look! How beautiful the Temple is!” To which Jesus replies “Don’t you know? The day will come when not one stone will be left on top of another, all will be thrown down.” The conversation that follows there in Mark 13, is the exact same conversation we find ourselves in today, in Luke 21. Jesus and His disciples, talking about The End, of Time.

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you, in the knowledge of God and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

I’ve never been one for detective novels, but maybe some of you have. As children perhaps you read The Hardy Boys, or Nancy Drew. Later on, you might have picked up Sherlock Holmes, or something by Agatha Christie. And of course there’s always television—everything from Murder She Wrote to Scooby Doo Where are You, mystery shows and whodunits for all ages. Well the fun of any good detective novel or a whodunit television show is of course to look for the clues along the way, in order to see if you can solve the mystery and, figure out how the story is going to end. “Whodunit? Huh? Could it really have been Colonel Mustard in the kitchen with a billiard ball?” Now some of the clues along the way are going to be obvious; everyone will notice them. But the really good clues, the important ones, they’re usually small, and obscure. They don’t seem very important at

first glance, and they are easily overlooked. The really good and important clues may be hidden—but often, they are hidden in plain sight. Looked at but not seen, seen but not understood—the really good clues are the little things, most folks will simply miss.

Jesus and His disciples, that long ago day in front of the Temple in Jerusalem. Time is rushing to an end! Jesus said. Well, if you remember my sermon two weeks ago, what Jesus actually said was time is rushing toward a *beginning*, in the words of our Lord all these “endings” are like birth pangs. In the hands of God all the endings in your life personally, all the endings in the life of this world as a whole, they point toward the great and glorious beginning of what we call the Kingdom of God!—that was the sermon two weeks ago, just a refresher course today. For now, Luke 21, time as you know it is rushing to an end! Jesus said. The world as you know it will soon pass away! And there are signs. There are clues, that this will soon take place. Do you see them?

Some of the clues, are pretty obvious. The sun, the moon, the stars. Distress among the nations, the sea roaring, the heavens shaken, the Detroit Lions winning a football game—I know it was only the Cleveland Browns, but still. These are the signs that everybody sees, these are clues concerning The End that everybody picks up on—and as the saying goes, film at 11.

But the really important clues. The details hidden in plain sight, the ones that matter the most but are understood the least—these are the clues, the signs we need to look for. What are they?

A baby, born in a stable in Bethlehem. Shepherds, angels, wise men; a promise made and a promise kept. That same baby, that same baby grown to adulthood, teaching the crowds, healing the sick, casting out demons—when you read the Gospel of John, you'll notice that every time Jesus works a miracle, it's called a sign, wonder why that is, hmm—the ministry of Jesus, it's a sign. It's a clue, right there, plain to see, if you care to look. And there are other signs, other clues—the cross of course, and the empty tomb. In the Old Testament prophets it plainly says, that when people start rising from the dead? That's a great sign that the End Times have begun!—well, we believe the first person *has* been raised from the dead. His name is Jesus Christ, Easter means by definition that we are living in the End Times. The empty tomb is a pretty good clue that the end is near—but it's a sign that even for Christians, may be hidden in plain sight.

And then there's you. You. You also are to be a sign, of the End of Time. You see Old Testament prophets like Joel for instance, they tell us that in the last days, the Spirit of God will be poured out. And God's people will be filled with this Spirit, and will live like it, and it'll show! And people will

see. When those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ are filled with His Spirit and it shows in their daily lives, that's a sign! That's a clue! The end which is really God's great new beginning, the end is near! You, are the clue!

Put it this way. If I told you that my confirmation class is a sign of the end of time, you'd probably assume I just had a really rotten class and that the kids were just terrible, terrible. Actually, it'd mean the opposite. If I told you my class is a sign of the end of times, what that would mean is that these kids are catching the faith, that our God is catching them and turning them and making them true disciples, if those kids are a sign of the end of times—that's a good thing! That's a Spirit thing. If only it was true for all of us!

And it could be. It's not that the Spirit of God is reluctant, you know. The Spirit would just love to fill you up and put you on display too, so to speak. What gets in the way? Obviously, our sin. More specifically, in the words of Jesus today, verse 34, we get weighed down with life. And when we get weighed down with life, we don't make very good signs. When we get weighed down with life, we may still be signs, but the message is hard to read, like a bill board hidden by trees; like a church marquis covered with snow, worries and cares and fears. Wants and desires, greed and envy, pride, and simple indifference, it covers the sign. It hides the clue. And it pushes

away the Spirit of God, the Spirit that wants to transform your life, as a prelude to transforming the whole wide world.

The Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for you, for the world, for the salvation of all who believe. If the subject is the End of Time, there is no plainer, more important, or more often overlooked clue than the cross and empty tomb. And the second most plain, most important, most overlooked clue—the Church. The people shaped by the cross, filled with the Lord's Spirit, living in His amazing grace. People like you. May this be the day, the day the Spirit catches up with you for your own sake; and for sake of the world out there, so badly in need of a sign.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.