**Jude 20-25 November 21, 2021 (Last Sunday of the Church year)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the book of Jude here re-reading these words, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jude, the brother of James and half brother of Jesus writes the letter that we find in our Epistle lesson, a book of the bible we have been studying on Monday nights and Tuesday afternoons in our Bible Study. He initially writes hoping to encourage them in the common salvation that they have but ends up having to encourage them to contend for their faith amongst a group that has infiltrated their congregation and turned them against the Word of God preaching and teaching a false doctrine that God’s grace can be used to justify unrighteous actions including sexual immorality. What you find here this morning are the final words of the book of Jude, a we come together here on the final Sunday of the Church Year, hearing in our other readings about the earth “wearing out like a garment” in Isaiah. As we hear in our Introit that we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new Earth, and in our Gospel lesson where Jesus himself says, “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”

The end is coming, and with it the judgment of all people. To the righteous, those who believe an eternal joy awaits in heaven with Jesus Christ their Savior. A joy beyond understanding. This is the mercy that Jude speaks about in verse 20. “Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” Judgment Day will be a day of mercy, a moment of deliverance, rather than seeing this world as the only thing that matters those who go to be with Christ will see the destruction of this sinful world as a blessing and mercy because we will be separated from Satan and his demons and finally reunited in a return to the Garden of Eden with God in perfect fellowship for all eternity. This is not something to be feared, but rather something to look forward to, something we yearn for and look for and are reminded at this time of year not only by our readings, and by our hymns, but also by the seasons. The days are shorter, the leaves usually have all fallen by now, but they are just about gone. This time before Thanksgiving and Winter is an apocalyptic time of growing darkness and the evidence of sin in creation itself as we see death all around us. But it’s a good thing, a time of rejoicing, a wonderful reminder that we are not staying here, we are heading for a greater joy. Judgment Day is something to look forward to.

The end is coming and with it the judgment of all people. Earlier in Jude, he describes these individuals who infiltrated the church and confused and corrupted the people by saying, “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.” He goes on a few verses later to call them “Scoffers that were predicted by the apostles, scoffers who follow their own ungodly passions.” He even earlier in the book of Jude speaks about the destruction that came at the hand of God to the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness. He talks about the angels who rebelled who remain chained in darkness, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their horrible wickedness with fire from heaven. He compares these individuals to these groups of people saying “They in like manner to these people rely on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.” The judgment that comes upon them therefore will not be mercy like to those of us who believe, it will be a sentencing and conviction of their own rebellion. It will be an eternity in the blackest darkness, in the sadness of separation, and the pain of a never ending fire. Judgment Day will not be a day of rejoicing and celebration, it will be the culmination of their lives of sin, it will be a shocking revelation of their own rebellion and it’s consequences. Judgment Day is not something they would be looking forward to if they truly understood what was coming.

Which is what makes Jude’s call for us this morning so important and also so shocking. Our world is full of scoffers and those who blaspheme God and His name. You could say that you live in a time where the whole world seems to be like Sodom and Gomorrah where everywhere we look we see evil individuals, those who are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires, loud-mouthed boasters and those who show favoritism to gain advantage. We ourselves are guilty of these same things, to grumble, to fail to be content with what God has blessed us with, to follow our own sinful desires and boast in things that don’t matter in the eyes of God but rather things that seem to matter in the eyes of the world around us. We sin, we use our positions of advantage in the church to do what we feel is right even if it means it’s to the detriment of the Gospel and the spreading of God’s Word and the love of Jesus Christ to others. We are guilty of these horrible things that we find in the book of Jude. But we also are guilty of a greater atrocity, which is that we hear what Jude urges us to do here at the end of His book, and we don’t do it.

Despite the sins of others, despite their evil, despite their rebellion, despite everything they have put this church through and the fact that they seek to destroy it, Jude writes in verse 23, “Save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” He says that we should wait for the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life, and then he tells us to save others and to show others mercy with fear. We like the mercy we receive, we’re all on board with that, we enjoy that part of it and almost come to expect it from God, that was the controversy they were facing, that God’s mercy was something that could be taken advantage of in order to receive mercy, that God would forgive and forgive and we could just keep willfully and knowingly sin and God would forgive us. We want mercy from God, but here Jude is saying that even to the most rebellious, the evil one that you know who hates God and curses God and wants nothing to do with God, do everything in your power to snatch them out of the fire and to show mercy to them. Because you can’t claim ignorance, you can’t say you don’t know what’s coming for them if they remain in their rebellion and unrepentance. Judgment Day is coming and left in their state they will face the horrors of hell. God has shown you mercy, and we are called to show them mercy as well.

God’s love or us changes how we see others. God’s love for us transforms our relationship with other people whether they are friends or family or acquaintances or even strangers. We have a calling from God to reach out to them and be a witness to God’s love in order for the Holy Spirit to work on their hearts and snatch them out of the inevitable fire that they are heading to. So often we see these scenes in action movies where the good guy has finally won, he’s overpowered the bad guy, we see it in films like the James Bond movies and super hero movies. And they look down at the plight of the villain, and we see them meet a grisly fate, destroyed by their own evil contraption that they had hoped to inflict upon the world or upon our hero, and we find a grim and satisfying delight that they get what’s coming for them, they are destroyed in this horrible manner and they deserve it. This is not our lives as Christians, God takes no delight in the destruction of any of his creation, God takes no pleasure in seeing anyone suffer and reject His love and mercy and go to the fires of hell. God has placed you in their life to reach out to them in love and tell them the truth, it’s really what’s at the heart of saying as Jude does, “Hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” It’s simply stating the obvious, your white robe of righteousness has a stain on it. There’s something there, we can’t ignore it, we can’t look the other way, we have to speak the truth to them in love because there is a problem, and left untreated it will lead to destruction. The end of a church year is the reminder that the end is coming, and we don’t know when. We can’t sit back and say that they will just figure it out on their own, that it’s none of our business, or that there is plenty of time. You don’t know how long they have to turn from their rebellion. You don’t know how long you have to reach out to them with the truth. But the clock is ticking.

You don’t always get the chance to say all that you want to, and sometimes you have to take every opportunity to say what’s really on your heart or what somebody needs to hear. It was 3 years ago that I wrote a sermon on our Gospel lesson’s text of Mark chapter 13:24-37. It was the final Sunday of the Church Year, and it also was the final sermon that I would be preaching to the saints at St. John Lutheran Church in Palmer, Kansas. It was an emotional moment, a final goodbye, and I was going to share with them words of encouragement and thank them for calling me, and being so good to my wife and I and my children and for teaching me so much in my time there as a pastor. It was going to be a very wonderful goodbye that I could share with them as they moved forward into the future of their church and I moved on in my own ministry here to Onekama to serve you. I never got to preach that sermon. An ice storm came, we canceled services that day, and I never preached it. I never got to say goodbye. It’s not guaranteed in this life to always get the moments you think you will with certain people, you don’t always get that chance. But God has blessed you with today, today is the blessings and opportunity to reach out to others in love, not to say the perfect thing or do the perfect thing but for the Holy Spirit to work through you. And you earn nothing for your own salvation, but rather it’s to share the mercy that you have received as you wait for Jesus to return and give you the promised eternal life that he won by dying on the cross and rising from the grave.

That’s what Jude is telling these beloved saints, to encourage them, to not hold grudges, to remind them of the love that God has for them shown through Jude’s own half brother Jesus Christ. His final words are what I will share with you to end our message this morning, as we move boldly and bravely into a new Church year to face any and all challenges that come our way. As we forward as brothers and sisters in Christ, in a common confession of faith and common belief in the inerrancy of God’s Word. “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time now and forever.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.