

PENTECOST XXVII

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

Nov. 19, 1978

"HOLD OUT 'TIL THE END"

*But the man who holds out to the end will be saved.  
And this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed  
throughout the earth as a testimony to all  
nations; and then the end will come. Matt 24:13-14*

There is great fascination today with both the past and the future. The search for roots, the surveys for geneologies, the crusades for preservation of old historic buildings -- all these are indications that we cherish our past.

But equally true - there is great curiosity about the future. One of the questions that I get the most from young people is: what will our future life with God be like? The great interest in astrology today is another indication of future-fascination. All the environmental regulations -- as controversial as they are -- they are still indications of our concern for the future. The writings of Hal Lindsay and others like him also seek to be prophetic about the future. And there's not a person in this room who isn't concerned about a cure for cancer in the months and years ahead.

The disciples were pondering these same concerns as we encounter them in Matthew today. They had just been in the temple -- in their culture, there was no greater symbol for one's roots and the traditions of the past. And Jesus had informed them that this beautiful symbol would soon be destroyed. He could see that the Jewish people were on a collision course with their Roman oppressors. And in that confrontation - he knew one of the major assaults would be the destruction of the temple.

So the disciples naturally ask: When? When will this happen? They could not imagine a greater tragedy than the temple destruction. They thought for sure this would mark the end of the age. But Jesus would not allow them to think so narrowly -- so he goes on, graphically describing the confrontations of history before the end of time.

Jesus' aim here was to prevent the disciples from speculating on this event or that event as the determination of the last event. He knew that these disciples were like all other men - they would far rather speculate about END EVENTS than being involved IN THE POSITIVE BUSINESS OF PREACHING THE WORD.

So he concludes: Just hold out to the end regardless of the circumstances -- regardless of how destructive or discouraging things get. Because that's all I have called you to do. I have not called you to be my disciples in order that you will sit around trying to determine THE LAST DAY. I have called you to preach the GOOD NEWS -- that God will be victorious no matter how bad things get in this world. Your job IS SIMPLY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL throughout the world. You let me worry about the end of time.

In short - Jesus tells his disciples TO HOLD ONTO GOD and nothing else. ~~Because if they hold onto anything else - they are hanging onto a decaying idol~~ *He gives this warning because he feared that the disciples will all depart as is fact*

Regretably - human beings, whether Christians or not, often would rather have a decaying idol than TO HOLD ONTO THE LOVE OF GOD. That's clearly pointed up in the text today.

The disciples want to know all the bad news. They seem to be far more interested IN THE SIGNS OF DESTRUCTION than they are COMMITTED TO THE GOSPEL OF HOPE. They say to Jesus - "Come on, Lord, tell us all about all those signals that will mean the end!!"

Look around society today. So often we are just like those disciples. Look at the religions that are growing by leaps and bounds -- they are the doomsday religions. They are the ones who always have a negative message -- the ones who are always looking at the negatives of life -- always preaching condemnation. Isn't it tragic HOW RELIGIOUS PEOPLE SEEM TO RELISH the bad news!

Likewise - what do we find ourselves talking about in our own church here??? How much time do we spend

dealing with the signs of despair - the signs of discouragement? - Are we dwelling upon the Bad News of our struggles -- or the Good News of God's love and mercy for us. What are we hanging onto - the hope or the hassles of discipleship?

Likewise in our personal lives. What do we seek to energize our relationships? Do we look around at the signals of despair and use those TO KEEP OURSELVES GOING? Or do we look to God -- and really try to apply his example to our circumstances???

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In essence - Jesus was trying to illustrate for the disciples that they COULD NOT COUNT ON THE GLORIES of the past TO GET THEM THROUGH - nor should they fret and fear about the uncertainties and difficulties of the future.

Rather - their focus should be upon ONE THING - they should hold out to the end BY HANGING ONTO THE WORD OF GOD - because only God's love can save us from human alienation - and only God's promise can save us from the fear of an uncertain future.

~~In fact~~ - quite to the contrary of the many doomsday religions all around us - we look to the future with CONFIDENCE AND HOPE.

We have confidence because we have the love and mercy of God -- AND WE KNOW THAT HIS POWER CAN CHANGE THE WORST OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE.

And even if we should be defeated by the powers of evil -- we still have confidence BECAUSE WE WILL THEN SHARE THE VICTORY THAT GOD HAS PROMISED US FROM THE BEGINNING.

*You see all the signs of the end have been fulfilled for a long time [name them]. But as believers - we do not let these negative signs discourage us. Because we are confident that God will give us the final victory.*