“Everyone Remain Calm!”

Matthew 24: 1-14

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every disaster movie or hostage scenario on a television show always has that one pivotal moment when chaos takes over, and someone steps up and shouts, “Everyone remain calm!” Sometimes it’s the one trying to defuse the situation, and sometimes it’s the one who is causing the problem. The bank robber bursts in and as he waves his gun in the face of the teller demanding the cash says, “Everyone stay calm, and no one gets hurt!” The level-headed science teacher reminds their students in the face of a natural disaster to remain calm and solve the problem. The difference between those scenarios and what we read in our text this morning is that, for us, there is no problem to solve. There is no disaster described that we can overcome with the right amount of thoughtfulness and scientific acumen. When things are falling apart around us, the world isn’t telling us to remain calm and no one gets hurt, they simply persecute and destroy.

The end times are happening all around us even now. The signs of the end of the age that Jesus describes for us are here already. Yet, amidst all of this chaos, destruction, and despair, there is still hope to be found for us poor, miserable sinners. That hope is not in overcoming the signs of the end. Our hope is not in the worldly victory over the things Christ details in our text, for “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” The signs that will lead up to Christ’s second coming are all around us—false prophets abound, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famines, earthquakes, and lawlessness—but these things are just the beginning. Jesus here proclaims to His elect children, “Everyone remain calm!” There is no need for angst and fear, for the time is not yet here, so “see that you are not alarmed” as we walk this life and experience these things. For these things must take place before the coming of the Son of Man, and as those who have been baptized into His death and resurrection, we endure these signs with the hope of salvation that is ours by faith.

But our sinful flesh simply can’t allow for that kind of peace to dwell within us. It thrives on the chaotic experience of living in the fallen world. The total depravity that is in each and every one of us refuses to allow any opportunity to bring true peace into our lives. Because that depravity feeds the Old Adam like a smorgasbord of energy. Every sinful thought, word, and deed—what we have done and what we have left undone—gives it new life and more power over us, dragging us deeper into its slavery. That is where our flesh wants us to be. It wants us looking over our shoulders in fear of what is happening around us, knowing that it means the end of the world is not only coming but

near. As we are bombarded on all sides by the sin in the world, our sinful nature wants us to recoil in fear of that evil and the thought that the Lord will return and find nothing but our poor, miserable state that leads to eternal condemnation.

It's not like it's a mystery that the world is full of evil. In fact, we sang about it last week in our closing hymn, "The World is Very Evil." We live in a world that crucified our Lord, continually persecutes Him and His Church, and minimizes sin to the point that what is evil has become "good" in their sight. And Satan has the world right where he wants it, or so he thinks he does. Yes, he has the ability to manipulate people into sinning, prodding their Old Adam to make decisions that they know to be contrary to God's will. He throws his flaming darts every chance he gets, and they land on their mark all the time, even for the Christian. But the Christian has a "secret weapon" against his attacks. We have a shield that has been placed upon us by our loving and mighty God.

That is why we must daily kill the Old Adam with all his sins and evil desires in the remembrance of our baptisms. Those waters in which that old man has been pressed down have placed a barrier upon us that repels the devil's attempts to draw us into the world and away from our Lord. The sinful flesh sees the things happening in the world and causes us to despair, but the new man that now dwells in us by faith sees nothing more than God's promises being fulfilled. It brings us the proper fear of God, which is the trust that He will fulfill every promise He makes to us—those promises to judge the wicked and the evil, and the promise that He has declared us justified by the blood of Christ. The reason that we can look around at the evil in the world, the abounding false prophets, the people falling away from the faith, and all the things described in our text with confidence in our salvation, is because of what Christ has done for us by going to the cross to buy us back from each and every one of those things that seek our demise.

Every person since Christ ascended into heaven believes that they are witnessing the signs of the end because their generation is experiencing those things in a way no one else ever has before them. Again, that is our sinful flesh, being manipulated by the evil one to have us look for <u>the signs</u> of His coming, instead of <u>expecting</u> His coming. Jesus did not explain this to His disciples as a roadmap to know when the time will come. Even Christ Himself does not know the day or the hour, according to His human nature. He tells His disciples shortly after this discourse in Matthew 24:36, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." These signs are not meant as a guide to predict His coming, but He reveals these truths to us as a means of comfort. He reveals them so that we will know that no matter

the chaos, destruction, and depravity that surrounds us, He is still King over all, and He will return to bring us to Himself.

The way we remain calm in the face of this fallen world's chaos is through the absolution Christ brings to us in His means of grace. When we despair of the world around us and see the things described by Jesus happening left and right, we should be filled with hope. We are brought to the hope of the fulfillment of our salvation because of Christ's work, because of what He has done in shedding His blood to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. There's no magic spell or earthly shelter that will keep us "safe" when the day of our salvation comes. The only thing that can do that is the shelter of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives us that shelter here in this life by preaching His Word to us through His called servants, by washing us in the blood of the Lamb in the water of Baptism which brings faith and forgiveness, and by feeding us with the body and blood of our Savior bringing us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Those things can only be found where He has told us they will be, and they are present in His promised means that by His choosing He has given to us to receive by faith.

There's almost a comical reality in the truth that when it is finally time for Christ's return, there won't be any need for anyone to say, "Everyone remain calm!" Because in that moment, "in the twinkling of an eye…the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (1 Cor. 15:52)." Instantaneous peace and glory will be ours as those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the non-believer on that "great day of the Lord," as Zephaniah speaks about in our Old Testament lesson, even they will not be able to try and keep calm. They will also in the twinkling of an eye be judged and condemned for their unbelief, and be cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Lord will separate all people into sheep and goats, bringing you, His sheep, into the eternal comfort and calm of your Shepherd's embrace.

When that day does finally come—and it will indeed come—whether in our lifetime or after we have attained the glory of heaven by our death on this earth, we will be perfected in an instant. Our citizenship in that "Sweet and Blessed Country" to which we have been granted a place among the whole host of heaven in the presence of our Savior will be fully consummated. It will be an everlasting truth that will never fade, an everlasting calm as we dwell in the peace of Christ forever. By faith, the Lord keeps us calm in this life by His Word and His Sacraments, knowing that in those treasures we look forward to the day of His coming, when the true fullness of all that He has shown and promised us will be ours. Everlasting peace, righteousness, and glory will be ours as we stand before the Lamb on His throne, praising Him with all the saints in the light of His love forevermore. Amen.