

SERMON 899

November 30, 2014

The First Sunday of Advent

974th Week as Priest

801st Week at St Dunstan's

66th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Last night before the end of the first quarter, I knew that half of us would surely think that it was the end of the world—and the other half would feel like they had won the Mega-Millions Lottery.

I'm talking, of course, about the Iron Bowl. College football, I'm afraid, is the secular religion of the South. People are more fanatical and passionate about their football team than practically anything else in their lives. They have a stronger affinity for their university than they do for their hometown, their state, maybe even their church. Winning or losing these games becomes a matter of self-esteem and self-worth. I think it's out of control. Honestly.

I know that there are some people in this state who really don't care about football, or they pretend they don't. That's the way I am. I pretend that I don't care, but it's because I care too much.

So here's what I am telling *myself*—it's *not* the end of the world. The end of the world is something altogether *different*, believe me.

Jesus had been in the Temple earlier that day. As he came out, one of his followers expressed amazement at the beauty and grandeur of the building. But Jesus was unimpressed. “Do you see these great buildings?” asked Jesus, like he was pointing at Bryant-Denny or Jordan-Hare. “Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” He was speaking of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which would come to pass in the year 70 AD, at the hands of the Roman army. But we know that he was also speaking of his own death, which would come to pass later that same week. “Weep for Jerusalem,” he told the women on the road to Calvary. “Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets.”

There is a profound sadness in this prophecy of Jesus. It is a lament for the Holy City. The scholars call the thirteenth chapter of Mark the “Little Apocalypse.” It is a vision of the end of the world—but within the revelation of the Old

Testament “Day of the Lord,” we discover the triumph of Jesus over death.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? When he describes the Day of the Lord, he says, “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.” This was precisely what Mark reported to have happened at the Crucifixion. Darkness at noon, an earthquake, the curtain of the Temple torn. Stars falling from the sky, the pillars shaken. It is the end of the world as we know it.

Have you ever felt this way before? That it was the end of your world? Surely if you have lost a child, or experienced divorce, or lost your job and your livelihood—you have felt like it was the end of the world. Perhaps you felt this way when your mother or father died. Or you have been this ill. Those who discover they have cancer or a heart condition know what I am talking about. You stare into the jaws of death and you realize, perhaps for the first time in your life, that your days are numbered.

If that were the end of the story, if all we had to live *for* and live *through*, was the certainty of death and darkness, then we would be a people most to be pitied.

But it’s not the end of the world. Our Lord was raised from the dead. And he tells us that we will see him “coming

in clouds with great power and glory.” He will come back for us, for those of us who are still here when he returns.

Otherwise, if we die before then, we are assured that he will raise us from death just as he was. We will be with the saints in light, in the courts of heaven. You really must not worry about this unnecessarily. It’s not the end of the world.

So the Day of the Lord is not a day of neverending darkness. The Day of the Lord will be a *reckoning*, to be sure, but it will be a day of deliverance for those who love Christ and believe in Christ. And I want you very much to believe. Believe in Christ. Believe in his power to save. Believe in his resurrection from the dead.

Maybe this good news doesn’t sound very helpful to you right now. You may indeed be overwhelmed by the suffering of the present day. I understand. The worries of the day are more than we can endure at times. Especially in the face of great tragedy, and sickness, and outrageous fortune. If so, if this is the circumstance of your life right now, I want to say to you, “Hang in there. Help is on the way. And you are not alone in your suffering. We are with you. This congregation is with you. And we will not leave you alone or comfortless.”

Saint Paul said, and I do believe, that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.” Hold on to

your holy hope. Continue to pray, and come to church, and we will share in your joys and in your sorrows. That's why we are here. It's not the end of the world. It's the beginning of a new way of living. It's the beginning of hope. **AMEN.**

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