



St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 24:15-28

Theme: "Finding God where He Truly Is"

Our text for today is from the Gospel lesson just read, with focus on the final words, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

The Israelites were grumbling. Moses had been up on the mountain a long time, and they were beginning to doubt that he was coming back.. They had been wandering for a long time, and they just couldn't bear to wait any longer. So they asked Aaron, Moses' brother, to make a golden calf for them. Aaron took their riches and gold and made a golden calf for them to worship. And they called it the LORD! So they took the name for the one true God, and used it to worship an idol. Where was god for them? Since God didn't work on their time schedule, they tried to push the schedule. They tried to make God's time and wisdom, fit their time in wisdom. Impatient with God's timetable, the Israelites strayed....they made an idol with their own hands and called it "god."

How often, though, do we do the exact same thing? It is very easy for Christians to get uneasy this time of year. We start to talk about the end of the world and judgment day... and there is this looming question: "so when is He coming?" I mean, come on, it's been 2000 years. Get on with it! We so want to put God on a clock, and make Him work on our schedule. We want to know where in the world God is and why He let's things happen the way He let's them happen. We want in on the BIG SECRET and my friends...we want to call the shots!

If you doubt that...walk through the Christian Book section of any book store and just look at the predominant subject matter. Most all of the writings found there will be dealing with the end times...the Eschaton. And all of the writers will attempt to unlock the secrets of Scripture so that you might be able to figure out just when and how the Lord will return. And in all of these writings, the authors are always very sure that their interpretations are exactly correct...even though Scripture itself tells us that Scripture is not for the private interpretation of man!! You can almost hear them say "Look here is the Christ!"

So it is that Jesus says to the disciples: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand."

Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

Our impatience and unbelief work against us all the time. Christians get impatient with God. We don't want Him to come in His time. We want Him to come in our time and in our way, because we think we know what is best. Satan loves this and he uses it to his advantage. You see, part of the problem with this whole question of "where is God" betrays a problem with modern Christianity. For most Christians, God is in their heart... or God is where there is excitement and perceived spiritual power. So when I want to look for God, I look inside myself. I'm then forced to deceive myself into believing that because I'm a nice person, because I do good things and I feel

spiritual, God must be here. **Or that when I** can generate enough faith on my own, **then** God will be present with me! **Or if I** can exude enough divine goodness on my own, God will bless me with His presence and Grace.

But that's never enough. **If I am** looking at God within... **then** how do I know if I ever have enough faith? **Have I been** good enough for God to dwell within me? **Have I been** nice enough or friendly enough? **Have I gone** to Church enough, prayed enough...**thought** about the Lord enough???

The answer, of course, is always "no" you haven't. **You look inside** yourself to justify your faith and what God is doing in your life and you are always sorely disappointed. **You are a** sinner from birth, and so every time you look inside yourself for God, you are reminded of your guilt and sinful core that is within you because of your nature.

So what do we do? **We want there** to be signs and wonders. **Jesus Himself prophesied** that in the Last Days there would be false christs who would run about with signs and wonders that would deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. **This is at** least part of the reason that we have so many bizarre cults and religions here in America.

Everyone wants to encounter God and have a real spirituality... **but they** do not want that encounter to happen at the Cross...**or in** Baptism, or in the Sacrament of the Altar... **all** the places where God Promises to be found! **People search for** God and yearn for God on their own terms and they ignore the places where God Himself Promises to be!

In our text Jesus says that when false teachers and false christs come about with promises of wonder and power, but don't believe them! **There is only** one place to find God, and that is at the cross. **People ask where** in the world is God? **Jesus answers, "I am God, and you find me in suffering, in weakness and in great humility."**

"Where the carcass is, there, the eagles will gather." It's a very ugly picture, and perhaps one of the most perplexing statements in the book of Matthew. **But the situation is this:** where Jesus is, the crucified Jesus, **there** His people will gather. **And where is** Jesus? **Jesus is to** be found in the pure preaching of His Word and the right administration of His Sacraments. **In other words, Jesus is here. Right here. Right now. You don't need** signs and wonders and miracles to encounter God. **You need Jesus. And here He is. His Word is the sign and wonder. Baptism is His sign and wonder. The Supper is His sign and wonder...for these are where He promises to be!!**

But Satan knows this. He knows that our sinful nature makes us impatient and weary of waiting for God. **So Satan tries** to put up false christs and false messiahs to get in the way. **Satan wants to** point constantly away from God's Word, and His Sacraments as Divine revelation. **Satan wants to** constantly point away from Jesus and His cross...**in the** same way, anyone who claims to know the Will of God apart from the Scriptures is not from God. **It is really** that simple and anything that clouds the simplicity of this is the smoke and mirrors of satan who loves to cause doubt where God seeks to give confidence!

This gets us back to our Old Testament reading. **The people of** Israel would not wait for God. **They wanted to** encounter God in their own way, in their own time. **In the same** way you and I seek God in our own ways and in our own time apart from His Word and Sacraments. **But God does** not work that way. **He has a** better way. **While you and** I would hunt and search for God in the strangest of places... **He promises to** you, that you will find Him in His death and resurrection.. **"Where the carcass is, there the eagles gather."** **That is to** say, you and I... **His Church,** gather around His death. **As St. Paul** said, **"as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do**

show the Lord's Death until he comes." Jesus' death on the cross is a scandal and an unbelievable fairytale to the world. **Yet, in Christ's Death** is the certainty of our salvation. **In His Resurrection** is the certainty of our own resurrection to eternal life!

So while you and I face uncertainty and questions about the end times...**while** we see wars and rumors of wars...**while** we see and hear people pointing that "**there is the Christ**" and "**here is the Christ**"...**while** satan would cast doubt and confusion as to when and where Jesus is to be found...**we** simply cling to Christ the Crucified and Risen One. **And you know where** to find Him. **You find Him** where He promises to be found. **You find Him** by way of the very means He assigns Himself to...**in His Word...in Baptism...at this** communion rail, in His Supper! **He's right here**, in His House, where He promised to you that He would always be. **That is all** we need to know as we wait patiently for our Lord to come and gather us unto Himself in His good time and wisdom. **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.**

Third to the last Sunday of the Church year, 2008

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