

Sermon for the Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
“He Who Endures to the End”

Mark 13:1-13

11/18/18b

1. The Christian life, someone has said, is more like a marathon than a sprint. Now I’ve never run a marathon, but I think I understand the meaning of this. In a sprint, you try to run as fast as you can over a relatively short distance. It’s hard work, but it’s over pretty fast. A 100 meter dash might take some of us less than 15 seconds. In a marathon, on the other hand, you have a great distance to cover: 26 miles 385 yards to be exact. A marathon is a long race that takes many hours for most people to finish. While in a sprint speed is what you need, in a marathon what you need is endurance. You need the capacity to keep on going despite fatigue, soreness, monotony, and pain.

Following Jesus is no sprint. The Christian life is not a brief undertaking, now begun and soon over. Following Jesus is a lifelong endeavor. My own Confirmation verse laid out before me the lifelong commitment I should expect as a baptized child of God: “Be faithful unto death”. Revelation 2:10 also proclaimed the reward my Savior promised me: “and I will give you the crown of life.”

2. At the Church Year’s end we are reminded through God’s Word of some important truths. We are reminded both that Jesus is returning on Judgment Day and also that we are to watch and wait for Him. The Lord’s return may be soon; it may be far off. Perhaps we will live to see that Day; perhaps we will die before it comes. In any case, we are called to remain steadfast and constant in faith; we are called to cling to Christ and, trusting in Him alone, endure whatever comes our way.

3. In our text Jesus was with His disciples in Jerusalem. It was Passover season—Jesus’ last. Jesus and the twelve were leaving the temple when one of the disciples remarked with wonder about the massiveness of the temple. Jesus must have shocked all the disciples when He announced

that it was to be destroyed. What? The great temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem? Destroyed? Destroyed as a previous temple had been six hundred years earlier, by the Babylonian armies? When would this happen? they anxiously wondered. How are we going to know that it's about to happen?

Jesus, He gave no dates, but used this moment to teach and warn the disciples about what kind of opposition, hostility, and even murderous hatred they should expect from people who were against God and Christ. Jesus spoke of deceivers and the need to be wary of anyone claiming to be Christ (v.6). Jesus spoke of future struggles and battles and wars, future earthquakes and famines, and the need not to be frightened or alarmed by these inevitable things (v.8). Jesus spoke of arrests and interrogations, of beatings, betrayals, hatred, and murder—all directed against these disciples. Heavy stuff—sobering and serious! Yet as a comforting counterweight to it all Jesus offered assurances of divine aid and protection. Going forward the disciples could know that as they trusted in their Lord Jesus Christ, no enemy, however fierce, could ultimately gain the victory over them: “He who endures to the end shall be saved”. The Savior promised His salvation.

4. We should consider this morning what our Savior's call means for us, what this “endurance” looks like in our own life of discipleship. Much has changed since the time of the early church, yet much has stayed the same. Deceivers are still about, and we must be alert to them. We must be alert, with God-given wisdom, to discern their lies, comparing them always against Scripture, our sure source of truth. Natural disasters, wars, and hardships are definitely still occurring in our day. While we should certainly be attentive to these signs of the end, we should remember Jesus' words that these things “must happen, but the end is not yet” (v.7). We should above all see these difficulties as occasions to give a Christian witness by loving our neighbor and showing compassion. And, violence toward Christians is definitely still around today. Until now it has probably not touched you; in days to come it may. Yet for all that we are not to be afraid or cower in fear. We are to

make a bold confession of the things we know, holding firmly to Jesus' promises just like the first disciples did. Even if it costs us, perhaps costs us dearly, we are to, as our Epistle put it, "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

5. Endurance, that's what the apostles of Jesus needed then and it's what we need now. When it comes to enduring, do you ever wonder whether you can? I mean, when the fatigue, soreness, monotony, or pain of this earthly journey get so great, do you ever wonder whether you can keep on keeping on?

My junior year of high school I ran track. My race was the mile. It was four laps around the quarter-mile track. I had a really good season and was getting ready to try to go to state. I sure hoped I could make it. When the qualifying race came, I was keyed up, eager, nervous, inexperienced, and hopeful all at the same time. I knew I either had to hit a qualifying time that was a huge longshot for me, or I had to be in the top three finishers. When the gun went off, I leapt into the lead. I held the lead through three laps. Then as we started to round the final turn I got passed. First by one, then by another, and finally by a total of four runners. Having gone out so fast so early, I was out of gas; no more endurance. No chance for me to overtake those guys, and my hopes of making it to the state meet were dashed.

I recently visited a Christian man who was having a hard time with his separation from his wife. He was elderly and his health condition required him to live in assisted living, while his wife resided at their house. He felt lonely. "I miss her so much" he said with tears. For this man, enduring as a Christian was not so much about being persecuted for his faith, or staying vigilant against false teachers or the like; for him it was about just getting through the continuous ache of the separation, that constant dull sadness. Maybe you know how that can be. How can someone like that man endure, where can he find the strength and the

will? How can you and I endure and carry on as Christians when the marathon is long and we feel so very weary?

6. I told that brother in Christ what I also want to tell you: we endure in one way: by God's grace. We endure as those who are by nature weak and sinful, yet who are strong in the grace of Jesus. I want to tell you today that there is one—yes, there is truly only one—who has endured His race perfectly to the end. And it is His victory that has already become yours in Baptism. It is His endurance that has already become yours in Baptism. It is Jesus. He entered our world in our flesh, entered bravely onto the plan and mission which His Father gave to Him, and He pursued this saving mission with unwavering devotion, commitment, and endurance *for you*. From the start He knew that He had come to offer His life, to suffer the Law's condemnation against sin (can you imagine?) and that is what He was determined to do *for you*.

You know, Jesus had many off-ramps available to Him along the journey. The devil in the wilderness offered Jesus easy ways out: throw Yourself down from the temple; bow down and worship me. Jesus refused, fixing His gaze on the cross (Matthew 3). Once some Pharisees warned Jesus to run to safety, because "Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). In reply Jesus said, "Go and tell that fox, '...I must go on My way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'" He looked unflinchingly to the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus in anguish asked His Father to spare Him from the coming horror, yet quickly added, "not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). And when Peter struck with the sword, thinking to save Jesus from arrest, Jesus objected: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (vv.53-54).

Yes, in this marathon of His ministry to redeem us, Jesus refused every off-ramp and easy exit and Jesus pressed steadfastly on to take our sins away. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus "endured from sinners such

hostility against Himself”...that He “endured the cross [itself]”...“*for the joy that was set before Him*”. Jesus, enduring in His mission to the end, laid down that life for you and me and then, on the third day, was raised again! On Easter Jesus was “saved” from death (cf. Mark 13:13)! Hebrews 12:2 affirms that Jesus is now “seated at the right hand of the throne of God”. This is “the joy” that was before Him—returning to the glory of His Father, together with the joy of having redeemed all mankind, including you and me, and preparing a place for us believers in heaven.

7. “He who endures to the end”—who is that, really, but Jesus! And “He who endures to the end” is also every man, woman, and child who has union with Jesus by Baptism and faith. It is me and it is you. You are given grace to endure in your life of discipleship, whatever its shape might be, whatever its particular difficulties, struggles, and pains may be, you are given grace in Christ to endure, and to endure to the end. “Be faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10)—He will help us do it—then at the end, by His promise, you will be saved. At your death you will inherit the crown of life. At Jesus’ return your body will be raised in glory. This is Christ’s promise; it was His promise to the apostles then; it is His promise to you and me today.

8. I don’t anticipate ever trying to run a marathon; my trick ankle wouldn’t allow it, I think. But I am in another kind of marathon, one more serious and important. You are in it with me—the marathon of the Christian life. It is a long and arduous endeavor, and countless challenges meet us in the race; yet we do not run alone or under our own feeble power. We are baptized; we are in Christ; we are under God’s grace; we are filled with the Spirit; we are fortified and equipped by our Savior’s body and blood with all necessary endurance. For our Savior has Himself already endured to the end so that forgiveness of sins and eternal life might be granted to us believers as a sheer gift. It is the will of God that we believers should cling to Jesus Christ alone, now this day, tomorrow, and all our days, and He will surely help us to do just

that. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

As this Church Year draws to a close, rejoice that you are in Christ Jesus. Rejoice in the salvation that is yours in Christ Jesus. Rejoice that Christ is with you and in you, enabling you to endure, yes, to endure to the end.

Amen

TEXT

Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”

² And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”

⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁶ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

⁹ “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. ¹¹ But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

NOTES

Exegetical Statement: In his “eschatological discourse” Jesus teaches about both the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, and about the end of the world/the second coming of

Jesus on the Last Day. Jesus neither keeps these matters a secret nor reveals exact details. Here in our text Jesus rather teaches the disciples that within their greater purpose of bearing witness that Jesus Christ is Lord, they will in days to come need to be alert, aware, wise, and prepared to endure all kind of suffering for Christ. Yet Jesus promises that they will not be overcome by their adversaries (this reminds us of Yahweh's reassurances to the timid prophet Jeremiah at his calling). "He who endures to the end shall be saved" (v.13).

Focus Statement: Jesus endured to the end so that you might have a sure Savior in whom to trust all your days, to the very end. Thus trusting steadfastly in Christ alone, you shall be saved.

Function Statement: That the hearers ever cling to Christ, who endured to the end to secure our eternal salvation.