



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the 26th Sunday of Pentecost
November 12 & 13, 2016

Warily Waiting

Malachi 4:1-6

¹ *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.*

⁴ *“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*

Aaahhh!!!

Is that the thought you have whenever you remember that at some point there’s going to be a Day of Judgment?

Does an involuntary shiver run up your spine at the thought that someday Jesus will return to judge the "living and the dead"?

You might have noticed that the readings for today all point to that very fact. If you were listening God probably had your attention even before my scream a moment ago. Just the mention of God someday calling an end to things as we know them makes us all pause and take notice.

But, for us Christians is there really any need to be frightened by this? Must an embarrassing scream come flying out of our mouths when confronted by the End Times?

Not at all. And why not? Because we know where our eternal destiny lies. We know what the Bible teaches about our eternal home.

Paul has us and all Christians in mind when he writes: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from



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it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Php. 3:20-21).

We Christians know that heaven is our real home, and we know that Jesus "subjected all things to Himself" when He conquered sin, death, and the devil on our behalf. And with these enemies defeated by Jesus, we can be at peace – trusting that He's telling us the truth when He says: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3).

But, dear people of God, while you wait for that great day when Jesus personally escorts you into His "Father's house," grave danger lingers all around you. What danger is this? In today's Gospel Jesus warns us: "See that you are not led astray" (Luke 21:8).

Jesus knows us well. He knows how easily our minds can wander from "the one thing needful," that is, from being one with Him.

And it's true, isn't it? How many times during the course of this service – even just during the sermon – have you caught your mind drifting off? Maybe you took a quick glance at the bulletin. Maybe you thought about things you have to do later today. Maybe you thought about your job or your bank account, or something else. Isn't it funny how little those things matter in the grand scheme of things, and yet we find them so distracting?

When eternity comes – either when we draw our final breath or if we're still alive when Jesus returns – whenever it is that our time on earth is over – there won't be a single person – anywhere – whose thoughts will be on money or chores or the countless other distractions that often plague us here. There will, however, be a multitude of people who'll wish they hadn't allowed themselves to be "led astray" (Luk. 21:8).

For those people, a gut-wrenching, guttural scream will rise from deep within them. It'll be a cry of terror – terror at knowing what's coming to them – to be separated from God forever in the depths of hell.

And, their terror will be intensified by knowing that the judgment Jesus brings is their own fault – that their damnation stems from their own rejection of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

For some, the anguish will be all the more because they once *were* children of God – they'd been Baptized, they'd heard the gospel, and, led by the Spirit, had at one time, gladly received it.



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But, somehow, the enticements of the world – the lure of pleasure and leisure at the expense of remaining faithful to God – overtook them. The distractions won out over God's call to faith and Jesus' specific warning not to be led astray!

In the *Titanic* movie – as the ship was sinking, a wealthy man tried to buy a seat on one of the lifeboats. He offered a fortune in cash to a ship's officer who was going to command that particular boat. At first the officer took the money, but just as quickly, he re-thought his decision. It didn't take him long to figure out that all the money in the world wouldn't do him a bit of good if he stayed on board a sinking ship. He threw the money back in the man's face.

Think about it. What good will money or possessions be on Judgment Day? Someday – as Malachi warns us – the end will be upon us. Will you be ready?

You see, above everything else, Christians are to be ever watchful, lest the pressures and temptations to fall away from the faith overcome them. We can never relax; we can never let our guard down. But we also can't allow ourselves to forget that God promises to take care of us both here on earth and hereafter in heaven.

Dear people of God, through Christ, we'll live forever in a paradise that cannot be fully or completely described. Through Christ, all our needs of body and soul are fully met – now and forever. Our sins are wiped clean – forgiven and forgotten by God in Christ. Our place in heaven is secured for all eternity.

With this in mind – the imminent end of time and Jesus' warning not to be “led astray” – one of Luther's sayings comes to mind. Three simple words: “Hold the faith!” That is, remain strong in the faith. Treat it just as it is: your most precious possession. For through the gift of faith God declares you righteous and free of sin. Therefore, as you “hold the faith,” feed and care for it by taking advantage of His other gifts to you.

Feed and care for it by actively reading the Word of God every day, by making worship in the Lord's house a priority every week, and by receiving the Lord's Supper frequently, where Jesus, in His body and blood, forgives your sins and strengthens your faith – so that you will “not be led astray” and will therefore be ready for His return whenever that might be.

Beloved, as the day of Jesus' return draws near, remain in repentance and faith, and all will remain well with you! Be ever watchful for His coming, attend to your faith, care for it and nurture it, for, as Jesus says, “By your endurance you will gain your [eternal] lives” (Luke 21:19).



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And, because these blessings await us, no screams need be heard from us on account of Jesus' return. Not at all! Shouts of praise, certainly. And no doubt cries of thanksgiving from our lips will ring through the halls of heaven through the countless ages of eternity. Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen