**Daniel 12:1-3** November 14, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Saints Triumphant Sunday

**Don’t Worry, Your Name Is in the Book!**

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Ten days till our Thanksgiving Eve service. There are so many reasons to be thankful: family, friends, food, a place to worship, a place to lay your head at night, a paycheck or a check in the mail.

 But no matter how many blessings one has, there are more than enough things these days to put a person on edge, burrs you can never get out from under the saddle. As that hymn sings, we Christians are but strangers here. And it wears on a person. It wears. I am not talking about the politics, health issues and social media. We are strangers because our most valuable relationship with our Savior, creates values, and those values are just about always in conflict with the world aruond us.

 God’s message through his prophet Daniel is a message for people in stress and distress. Daniel knew about that stuff. As a young man, probably a teenager, he had been a wartime captive carried off from Israel/Judah to distant Babylon. Things went as well for Daniel as they could for a wartime captive. He had some fellow countrymen to keep him company. He rose through the ranks of government service as one of those ever useful foreigners, an intermediary between the conquerors and the conquered. Yet it wasn’t all good. After a few years, his nation of Judah was wiped from the face of the earth. His people, the Jews, existed only in exile. Daniel would never again see his homeland.

 While Daniel and the Jews were in their land of exile, the Babylonians were in turn wiped from the face of the earth by the Persians. The Jews were passive bystanders in the great events of world history. The remnant of Abraham’s children felt like they were riding a tiny raft in a hurricane. Then in chapters 10 and 11 of Daniel, God unloaded more chaos. He spoke of the future in the same language Jesus would use. There would be wars and rumors of wars; nation would rise against nation (Mt 24). God was telling Daniel, “If you think things are crazy now, just wait!”

 That is where today’s reading comes in. As God reveals the chaotic last days of this world, days we are in part experiencing, he reveals the end of it all for his people in Daniel chapter 12, verses one through three. I read…

**[*read the sermon text*]**

 *Daniel 12:1“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

 It is a message of hope for people living in times with little hope.

 Now someone might ask if we really are living in ***“a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until [now].”*** Is our time really all that bad? That’s a fair question. I don’t know that I can speak for every one of you this morning, but we got out of beds this morning. We weren’t sleeping on a dirt or stone floor. Maybe, like me, you were greeted by a dog who thinks the world of you. Nice way to start the day. We aren’t shivering and starving. Unlike some corners of the world, we do not face imminent invasion by a foreign army, nor government persecution for owning a Bible. How much stress and distress do we really face?

 On the other hand we have our own stresses and sorrows. Life is hectic. Time is an ever more valuable commodity. In spite of that, we so often waste it chasing totally unimportant things down rabbit holes, while the important are neglected. Information and sensory overload and isolation lead to ever worsening mental health in the general population, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

 Increasingly, we are discouraged from sharing the core values of our faith in the public sphere. And what greater sorrow can there be than for parents who raise children in the Lord, only to have one or more walk away from Jesus like he doesn’t even matter. If they would at least argue and fight it, wouldn’t that at least give you hope? A fight would make you think that maybe they realize there is something important at the bottom of it all. But to just walk away as if it is not even worth arguing about. Didn’t Jesus say something about *“the love of most will grow cold”*? (Mt 24:12).

 And are our souls not tormented by temptations so much more accessible than any time in the past? Once our lives were lived publicly, almost always within view of other people, which kept us on the straight and narrow, or if not that, at least to kept us from going off the deep end. But now in the privatized digital world, who is going to keep you from clicking the button? A commercial for some internet security service recently revealed how little shame is left. The voice on the radio said, “And we won’t ask what you were searching for on the internet at 1:30 in the morning, because it’s none of our business, or anybody else’s for that matter!” You know what she was getting at, right? I say this not only to identify sin, but to point out that there are spiritual battles in our lives that none before us had to face. How it torments a soul in whom the Holy Spirit lives!

 I can’t definitively say things are worse than they have ever been. However, there are things at work in our world that are a new and different kind of evil than anything humanity has ever seen.

 Spiritual stress and distress are real. If you were to say you do not feel it, I would ask whether you are a Christian. We need to hear the words that God spoke to his people in Daniel’s day, even though it was a different world, a world before DVD players, or even VCRs, or even black and white television, if you can imagine that. The hope for God’s people then is the same as it is now. The problems do change—sort of—but the solution and the hope remain the same.

 The first point of hope that God put out there for Daniel was someone, some thing, called Michael. ***“At that time [of distress] Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.”*** This Michael is elsewhere called an archangel, which means the chief of God’s created angels. This verse reminds us of another level of God’s care for us. In the spiritual realm God orders his angels to guard us his people. We don’t know much about them. We never see them, but God assures us that they are there!

 The second point of hope is that God says there will be an end to the endless conflict between spiritual light and dark, the kingdom of God and sin. Things will not forever continue as they are. This will end. It will end in judgment, a balancing of the books, a calling to account. Since this was the subject of last week’s worship service, I won’t say any more at this time. Nor should I, because there is better comfort than just that this world’s misery will end.

 Better, God promised a third point of hope, ***“At that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.”*** Written in the book…

 Back in the African villages, at least in south central Africa where we lived, every village had a certain important man. Where we first lived among the Tonga people, he was called the *sibbuku.* Kind of a strange word: *Sibbuku.* In English he was called the headman. Sort of like a mayor and city council and judge all in one. He was the where-the-rubber-hits-the road level of authority and law in African culture. He had a book, and that was a pretty big deal. That he had a book wasn’t such a big deal in the 1990s when we first arrived. But within living memory of the oldest members of the community, there had been no books. They had been pre-literate. The first book that most communities came into possession of (usually even before a Bible) were ledger books for the headman. Because he was the only person in community with a book, he came to be called *sibbuku*, that is, The Man With the Book. You know what was in that book? The names of the members of that community. Everyone who belonged in that village, their name was in that book. It meant you belonged there. You had a home. You had a family. You had a support network. If you were to do something really awful, (but not quite so awful as to get the death penalty), you would be banished from the village, a fate some thought as bad as death. And your name was blotted from the book.

 Perhaps by taking you to another place in time, you can begin to appreciate the blessing of being written in a book. It was an important concept in Bible times. So it was that Moses, in a fit of self-sacrificial love for the rebellious Israelites, prayed, *“Please, [Lord] forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written”* (Ex 32:32). Similarly Jesus reminded his disciples about what was important when he said, *“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”* (Lk 10:20). This same language continues right up to the end of the Bible, in the Apostle John’s vision of the final judgment: *“I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”* So you have a pile of books opened over there with all the deeds of humanity. Over here is a single book, not full of the deeds of humanity, but as we find out, a book with only names. *“If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”* (Rev 20:12,15). It is not deeds that get them into heaven. Anyone judged on deeds doesn’t get there. Those who have been brought to know Jesus as their Savior, their savior from their sin, from the distress of this life, from the eternal fires, already has their name written in that book of life. God knew. And he remembers. It is written.

 The final point of hope given to Daniel is the last verse. ***“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, [will shine] like the stars for ever and ever.”***

 “What will heaven be like?” we wonder from the time we are children.

 Let’s try to visualize it! The excitement of the youngster accepted into the college of his choice that he thought he had no chance to get into. The first time mother who knows that another life has begun, and for the time it is still her secret. The man standing in the front of the church as his beloved walks down the aisle in that dress she will wear only once in her life. You have seen people glow. Now your begin to understand heaven.

 A certain Christian author, C.S. Lewis, often tried to express the Bible’s descriptions of heaven in a way that the non-theologian could appreciate. He did this especially in his book *The Great Divorce* (which incidentally has nothing to do with either marriage or divorce.) In this purely fictional book, he imagined himself and others as mortals stepping off a bus into heaven. And it hurt. The sun was too bright. The grass was so stiff that when his fellow travelers walked across it, it wouldn’t bend. He couldn’t pluck a flower because the stem strong as steel. Then he realized that he could kind of see through himself and the other mortal travelers. It was because heaven was more real, and the beauty greater, and the smells stronger, and departed saints who had reached heaven through the doorway of death, were so much more alive than the recent bus arrivals from earth. Because in heaven, we will become what God created us to be and it will be glorious. And the sins that now tempt us and the distress that worries us, will not even occur to us, and if they did, rather than feel attraction or worry we would find those feelings strange.

 The Bible says we will be glorious. In Daniel it says our glory will be like the noonday sun, glory like the midnight stars. The strength of the one with the beauty of the other.

 We shall be Saints Triumphant indeed! Thank goodness God has written our names in the book! Amen.