

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 16, 2025
Isaiah 12; Luke 21:5-19

"End Times"

Liturgist: (reading Luke 21:5-19) “When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’ They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’ And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;’”

Mike (seated at a table): Good evening. I’m Mike Cole, your 9:50 **news anchor**. This is the news for Sunday, November 16th. The war continues in Ukraine with Russia drone attacks wreaking havoc on Donetsk.

Liturgist: “There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”

Mike: The **heat wave in Europe** this summer is reported to have caused 1,884 deaths, while wildfires in California and flooding in Texas have caused 195 deaths and \$60 Billion in damages. The US has seen an above average number of tornadoes this year and the first EF5 in the world since 2013.

Liturgist: “But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify.”

Mike: Christianity Today reports that North Korea now tops the list of countries with the highest rate of Christian persecution. Overall, 380 million Christians live in countries with a high level of persecution or discrimination against Christians. In 2024, 4,476 Christians worldwide were killed for their faith and 7,679 churches were attacked.

Liturgist: “So make up your minds not to prepare in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Mike: November 10th, marked the 36th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was on that date in 1989 that the Berlin Wall began to crumble not from the assault of armies but from the assault of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. During the years of the separation of Germany, the church had gone underground in the eastern sector. The faith was kept alive by house-church meetings, which also served as rallying points for those who opposed communism and its oppressive regime. It is a well-known fact that those who were most instrumental in the destruction of the Berlin Wall were Christian leaders.

I believe that we are living in the end times - but not in the usual sense of that expression. The end times in which we live have been brought about by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. I believe that, as followers of Jesus Christ, we have already seen “the end,” when the world reached a decisive turning point. At that moment, when the world nailed Jesus to the cross, the conflict between life and death, good and evil, God and Caesar was resolved in favor of life, good, and God.

It’s as if we’re sitting in a movie - a horror movie, to be sure, with monsters and unspeakable terrors - and we are fearful but we still know that, in the end, the stars of the movie will get out alive. With Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, a new kingdom was established - a kingdom not dependent on the right treaties, the right investments, the right politician, or the right longitude and latitude.

Here is a kingdom that is based upon what God has done and is doing for us and the world rather than on what we do. Jesus says, “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified.” How can he say that? How is it possible to think of the future and not be terrified?

I’ll tell you how. It is possible only for those who are convinced that something decisive has happened for the world in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was a decisive turning point in which God entered the world to save us from ourselves. Even when

Jesus departed from the disciples, he sent the Holy Spirit to them as a comfort, guide and friend, to demonstrate that he will never desert us.

Jesus didn't duck the question thrown at him by the disciples - he told them quite bluntly that, as his followers, their lives would not be easy. They would know no peace. There would be wars and rumors of war. But this is no reason to be terrified, because God's purposes are not dependent upon the success or failure of human beings and human institutions.

During the dark days of World War II, a man emerged from a bomb shelter in London and saw an old newspaper vendor, selling his papers amid the rubble. "Who won the battle last night," he asked the old man, half in jest? "I don't know," replied the old man. "I don't read the papers. I don't have to worry about who wins the battles because I already know who has won the war."

That is as good a summary of Christian hope as I can find. We have hope, not in the events of today, or even tomorrow, but we have hope in God's ultimate victory. We do not despair over the outcome of present battles because we know who shall finally win the war.

Way back when I was in college, I remember reading a short story entitled, Flatlands, about a world that was flat - everything was two-dimensional. The main character in the novel is Mr. Square who one day was visited by Mr. Sphere, who is, of course, three-dimensional. Sphere speaks to Square about his world of three dimensions, a world that is not flat. But Square is not convinced. Living in a two-dimensional world, it is too difficult for him to imagine another dimension. Eventually, Mr. Sphere is persecuted and driven out by the outraged flatlanders.

We are the flatlanders, unable to grasp the possibility of a reality beyond that which we have experienced. It's difficult for us to imagine a future reality which is different from our present reality. And yet, that is what we are called to do. No matter what our present circumstances may be, we are promised that the outcome is assured. No matter how bleak the present may be, we are assured that the future is bright.

One of the things I love about living in Colorado is the night sky and the stars. Up in Woodland Park the night sky is even darker and the stars more visible. Some nights I go out on my patio and just look up. It's really amazing that the longer you look, the more stars you see. Scientists tell us that when we are surrounded by the lights of the city, we can only see 250 stars on a clear night. But when we are in a more isolated setting, we can see ten times that many.

Similarly, when we are in dark circumstances, we need to look for the stars - the pin points of light that God brings to our world as signs of hope - a friend's embrace, a kind word from a stranger, an encouraging word from a co-worker, an unexpected "I miss you" call.

These stars penetrate the darkness of our world. In fact, it is the darkness that allows us to see them more clearly. The darker the night, the brighter the stars.

Last week I watched a recording of the final game of the World Series. When I sat down to watch the game, I knew the final score. But I still found myself getting anxious even though I knew who would win. I knew with a certainty what the outcome would be, but I was still nervous and anxious about individual plays. If that is true for something as inconsequential as a baseball game, is it any wonder that we are filled with anxiety about our very lives?

Generalized anxiety plagues us all these days. We're anxious about our kids, our grandkids, our great grandkids, our retirement, our sports teams, our politics, our government, our lack of unity, our health, our nation, our world..... you name it and someone is anxious about it. Philippians 4:6-7 advises us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

In other words, hand over to God whatever causes us anxiety and let God take care of it. That's easier said than done because we like to think we are in control of things. But the reality is that being anxious about something means that we are not in control. Rather than yielding to the temptation to increase our control, we need to stop obsessing about what we can't control and relinquish control to God. After all, God who created the heavens and the earth can certainly handle our puny concerns. St. Paul tells us to pray and petition God with thanksgiving, not with anxiety, not with worry, not with helplessness, and not with hopelessness; but with thanksgiving. When we approach God with gratitude, that changes the nature of our prayers and petitions. Grateful hearts reduce anxiety and increase hopefulness, which is really how we want to live life – with hope.

Whenever we feel as if we are living in a 6 o'clock news world, we have to remember that there are two six o'clocks in a day (unless you are operating on military time) - one at the end of the day and the other at the beginning. While we may feel at times that we're living at the end of the day, God assures us that we really are only at its very beginning. In Jesus Christ, God has given our six p.m. news world a six a.m. gospel.

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

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen