

September 21, 2025 Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: From Psalm 46

PASTOR: God is our refuge and strength,

ALL: An ever-present help in trouble.

PASTOR: Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way

ALL: And the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

PASTOR: Though its waters roar and foam

ALL: And the mountains quake with their surging.

PAUSE: Selah

PASTOR: There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

ALL: The holy place where the Most High dwells.

PASTOR: God is within her, she will not fall;

ALL: God will help her at break of day.

PASTOR: Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;

ALL: He lifts his voice, the earth melts.

PASTOR: The LORD Almighty is with us;

ALL: The God of Jacob is our fortress.

HYMN #157 "Rejoice, the Lord Is King!"

SUNG CONFESSION OF SIN:

HYMN #441 "Is Your All on the Altar"

CHILDREN'S SERMON:

READER:

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Malachi 3:13-18* "You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' 14 "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? 15 But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.'" 16 Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other,

and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. 17 "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. 18 And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 23:26-43* A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals-one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord;*

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen)
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: Chosen by Hannah Carrizales

SERMON: “THE IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS,” 1
Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 Pastor Tom Olson, 9/21/25
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Do you recognize this?

**The marketplace is empty
No more traffic in the streets
All the builders' tools are silent
No more time to harvest wheat
Busy housewives cease their labors
In the courtroom no debate
Work on earth is all suspended
As the King comes thro' the gate
...The King is coming
Praise God, He's coming for me**

...that was a popular, top of the chart, KTIS, contemporary Christian music of the 1970's by the Gaithers.

TRUMPETS: The Feast of Trumpets coming tomorrow and the internet is buzzing with questions about the return of Jesus...this

was a popular sermon topic in the 1970's but is hardly preached about today.

CURRENT: Recently, a whole new group of young people, even in their 20's, are re-examining the “signs of the times” which are even more intense than in the 1970's. They are all over the internet telling us that Jesus may be coming soon. Some of them, from all over the world, are getting dreams and visions about it.

CHURCH YEAR: The return of Jesus is the topic of the last Sunday of the church year. That is the Sunday we have our Thanksgiving service and dinner...so I am bumping “Christ the King Sunday” up to today.

CREED: Jacob recommended last Sunday the importance of focusing on the teachings outlined in the Apostles' Creed. There are three things in the creed yet to be fulfilled, “the coming of Christ,” the “resurrection of the body” and the consummation, “the life everlasting.” We will address them today under the theme “THE IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS.” I trust it will thrill your soul. Please turn to 1 Thessalonians 4, starting in verse 13. First of all we see...

I. THE DETAILS OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And

so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

IMMINENT: This event could happen any time now, perhaps very soon, perhaps tomorrow! It seems to me that the Apostles expected it to happen in their lifetimes. Here is what the Word of God teaches us about it:

1. THE LOUD COMMAND OF AN ARCHANGEL: There is going to be a loud command from an archangel. I suspect it will be the angel, Gabriel. Gabriel brought Daniel the prophecies of the last days, he announced the birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah, and he announced the conception and birth of Jesus to Mary. I suspect He will give the shout of the return of Christ. Scripture seems to indicate that believers hear the words and unbelievers hear a sound like thunder. Just imagine people going about their normal day routine and hearing, perhaps like Pentecost, in their own language, a great shout like this: "AWAKE O SLEEPER AND ARISE FROM THE AND CHRIST WILL SHINE ON YOU!" (Ephesians 4:15)

2. THE TRUMPET CALL OF GOD: That will be immediately followed by the trumpet call of God. A mighty blast will come from heaven that will get the attention of the whole world. Unbelievers will shudder with terror. When the children of God hear it, we will lift up our hands toward heaven and look up. Joy will fill our hearts, like the joy of a soldier at the end of a war that gets the notice that he can go home.

3. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD IN CHRIST: The archangel's shout and trumpet blast will penetrate to the depths of the earth and the bottoms of the seas where the remains of those who have died in Christ will hear it and rise up from their graves. All the believers that gave their life jackets on the Titanic to unbelievers in hope they would come to Christ will come to the ocean surface in new and incorruptible bodies and rise up in the

clouds to meet the Lord in the air. It would be interesting to be by a cemetery at that moment and see it happen.

4. TRUE BELIEVERS ARE CAUGHT UP INTO THE AIR TO CHRIST: Movies about this event portray Christians instantaneously disappearing, leaving clothes behind. It may happen that way. But the Bible tells us we will be CHANGED instantly, "*in the twinkling of the eye*" but I don't see why we would not ascend into heaven slowly like Jesus did or be able to throw down a piece of clothing like Elijah did. Both of them took their clothing with them. The disciples watched Jesus rise up into the clouds as He blessed them...*Acts 1:9 ...he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

FINALE: I am hoping to shout words of witness to those who are left on the ground as I go up. Perhaps something like this: "*Call upon Jesus for salvation and be faithful unto death. Or, 'Don't take the 666 mark of the beast.'*"

Secondly:

II. THE DATE OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

UNKNOWN: Paul tells us that we don't know the time or the date of the return of Christ but the Bible tells us to watch and pray and understand the season of His return. He compares it to "a thief in the night."

FEAST: Some Bible scholars who knew Jewish idioms of Jesus' day believe that *Mark 13:32 "...no man knows the day nor the*

hour...” refers to the Feast of Trumpets. Others disagree. Numerous sources say something like this source: *The idiom "no man knows the day or the hour" refers to the Jewish Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah or Yom Teruah), a holiday whose specific start was unknown until the new crescent moon was sighted and reported by witnesses to the Sanhedrin. This created a period of uncertainty for three days, during which the exact day of the feast's beginning couldn't be known in advance.*

UNEXPECTED: The believer knows it could be at any time. But the unbelievers will be totally unprepared and shocked when the true believers leave the earth without them. Some people are prepared for **“a thief in the night”** but others are totally unprepared. Jesus compared it to seven young women waiting for a late-night wedding banquet. They had extra oil for their lamps and were ready. Seven were not able to enter the wedding feast because they ran out of oil and were missing when the bridegroom arrived. We need to be ready at all times.

UNSEASONABLE: People on earth will think that we are entering into a time of **“peace and security”** at the very moment that Jesus will come back for His own. That is what we are heading into...a false peace. Israel has given President Trump a gift of a minora engraved with these words to honor him **“THE PRINCE OF PEACE”** for his role in bringing peace with Israel to a growing number of Muslim nations the middle east with the **ABRAHAM ACCORDS**. Right now, as we speak, the ink is still wet on a United Nations two-state peace solution for Israel and the Palestinians.

TEMPLE: The Temple Institute has everything ready for the Temple sacrifice to begin. I read recently that the prefabricated walls are being built this year for rapid assembly. They have the perfect **“red heifer”** to sacrifice for the holy ashes to consecrate the temple. It is very likely they have already prepared those ashes. They do not need the **“Ark of the Covenant”** to sacrifice. They did not have it in the time of Jesus either. All they need is the altar. It

looks as if Jews, Muslims and Christians will all be able to call Jerusalem the holy city and worship there. I have read that the Vatican may oversee it all. The world will see this as the beginning of the age of peace and true believers will see it as a sign of the end of the age.

We do not know the date but we can say with certainty that things are quickly lining up for it to happen. **FINALLY...**

III, THE DUTIES BEFORE THE RETURN OF CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

AWAKE: This passage tells us to be awake. It calls us to be **“sons of light and sons of the day.”** That is in contrast to criminals who work under the cover of darkness. Spiritually speaking it would mean that we want to be totally honest with God about our sins. Our warm, personal, daily, honest walk with God needs to be our priority. 1 John 1:7 puts it so well: **“...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”**

ARMED: The next thing we need to be is **ARMED FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE**. I am so excited that if Jesus tarries,

Dave Fischer is doing the OK Bible study in October with the topic of Spiritual Warfare. The timing of this study is God's timing. Our sword of the spirit is *"the Word of God."* I was so thrilled that we had twenty-four people out on Thursday to study the Word of God. Also, our adult Sunday school class has seen some improved attendance lately too. Please come out on Sunday because several of the class members need to be downstairs now to teach the children. We want the children to be "armed" as well with the Word of God. I never ceased to be amazed at how many Bible verses Charlie Kirk could instantly quote from memory in his conversations on college campuses. He was truly armed with the Word of God.

SAVED: Verse nine reminds us that God does not want us to suffer the wrath of God that will be poured out upon the earth at the end of the age. *Revelation 6:15-17 puts it this way: "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

ESCAPE: Verse ten of 1 Thessalonians 2 reminds us that Christ died for us to save us from the wrath of God. When he saves our souls, we are delivered from the wrath of God for sin. *John 3:17 puts it this way: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*

EDIFYING: The final duty that Paul tells us to do here as we wait for Jesus to come back is to *"edify and encourage each other."* We do this through worship and the Word of God. We do this in our small group Bible studies and prayer meetings. We do this one on one as we sit around the table or have believers over to our homes for fellowship. We need to do this more and more as we see the IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST approaching.

ST. JOHNS: One year, when I was pastor at St. John's Lutheran in Newark, Ohio, I had the people gather in chairs in the church parking lot where we looked up to the cemetery on the hillside above us. We gathered on the eve of THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS. That would be tomorrow. When it was sunset in Jerusalem (which would be about 10 AM Central Time) we blew the shofar, the ram's horn trumpet, and looked up to the cemetery to see the resurrection of those who had died in Christ. It was a merely a dramatic act to help us keep anticipating the actual day when it would happen. That was a church where many of the people studied prophecy and longed for the return of the church's bridegroom for the marriage supper of the Lamb. I hope we also are excited about the possibility that Jesus may return soon.

REACTIONS: This topic terrified me before I got saved, but after Jesus brought me to a living faith it now is my heart's greatest hope and desire. I love the way the Gaithers put it to music:

**Happy faces line the hallways
Those whose lives have been redeemed
Broken homes that He has mended
Those from prison He has freed
Little children and the aged
Hand in hand stand all aglow
Who were crippled, broken, ruined
Clad in garments white as snow**

**I can hear the chariots rumble
I can see the marching throng
The flurry of God's trumpet
Spells the end of sin and wrong
Regal robes are now unfolded
Heaven's grandstand's all in place
Heaven's choir now assembled
Start to sing "Amazing Grace"**

O the King is coming

**The King is coming
I just heard the trumpets sounding
And now His face I see
O the King is coming
The King is coming
Praise God, He's coming for me**

May the peace of God that passes understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

**HYMN #159 “Christ Returneth”
Lord’s Prayer
Benediction**

DOXOLOGY: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A-men. A-men. A---men.*

Postlude: Rebekah Olson