

Sermon Draft

Text: Jude 20–25

Sermon: Last Sunday of Church Year 2021 (Don't Forget)

The Last Sunday of the Church Year looks to the past, present, and future of God's economy. Our Old Testament Reading looks from the fleeting nature of the old creation to Yahweh's salvation: ***“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed”*** (Isaiah 51:6).

In our Gospel, Jesus promises the Church that he will come ***“in clouds with great power and glory”*** (Mark 13:26). He points his disciples from the seasonal fig tree to the solid future to be established by his eternal Word: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”*** (13:31). In light of that future, Jesus calls the Church in the present time to ***“be on guard”*** and ***“stay awake.”*** Thus, the Epistle calls the Church to live now in light of the future and final coming of Christ (Jude 20–25) but also to ***“remember”*** the word God has spoken in the past (Jude 17).

Jude's doxology draws all three times together: "***before all time and now and forever***" (Jude 25).

Have you noticed it doesn't take long to forget? By the time we get to the store, we can't remember why we went there. Just days or weeks after a national disaster people are back at their usual routines. Do we really still remember the events of September 11, 2001, it doesn't seem so. Our world has seemingly forgotten all about it and moved on to the next big thing. Though we know we are baptized into Christ, it's a daily battle to remember who we really are in Christ a child of God, no more and no less.

It is easy to forget the letter of Jude too, just twenty-five verses: just one chapter. But Jude has a very important message for us especially on this Last Sunday of the Church Year when we look ahead to Jesus' return on the Last Day. It's about not forgetting. Or, stated positively, about remembering.

Jude teaches us that the Church remembers Jesus because Jesus remembers us, His Church. And that is not as obvious a message as it seems. Remember, it's easy to forget. It's happened before; the church has forgotten Jesus.

What happens when we forget who Jesus is and what he's said? Jude wrote his little epistle around AD 68, roughly 35 years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Most of the apostles had died, and Jude, who was not an apostle, was compelled to write to the Church in their place. He writes with this stated purpose: ***"To remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe"*** (v 5).

The church had forgotten Jesus! They had forgotten his promised return. They had forgotten that he will come as both Savior of those who believe and Destroyer of those who do not believe, just as it has happened in the past at the exodus from Egypt. Having forgotten the reality of who Jesus is, some Christians perverted the grace of God into sensuality, turned forgiveness into license, and denied the only Master and Lord, Jesus (v 4).

Jude is a call to remember who Jesus is and what he has said both as Savior and as Destroyer. What happens when we forget? Look at the problems of this world. Making churches close during the pandemic, government that promotes anti-Christian lifestyles and laws.

A far cry from a nation that was founded on Biblical principles.

Remember that Jesus and Jesus alone is the Savior of this world. He has saved us from sin and death by his death and resurrection. He saves us even now by his Word and Spirit through the Means of Grace, where he does not remember our sin but forgives it. He will save us finally and fully from this world that's destined for destruction when he comes again in all his glory and fills you with joy (v 24).

What happens when we forget that Jesus will also return as Destroyer of those who do not believe? We see ourselves as someone securely saved. We are tempted just as the church of all times and places is tempted to be comfortable in our ways, even in our sins, living the way we want to live, giving ourselves license, falling into patterns of thinking and patterns of doing that we know are not in accordance with the Word of God. We convince ourselves that we do not need to worry about it or change anything.

Remember instead that Jesus truly will return someday as our judge. He calls us to repentance. He calls us to trust in his forgiveness. He calls us to live a new life according to his Word. And he calls us to remember that those who do forget will be destroyed in eternal, never-ending punishment.

As frightening as that is, how comforting to remember that Jesus never forgets us! God addresses our forgetting that Jesus is the Savior and the Destroyer by reminding us the same way he did the Early Church through Jude: preparing us for the future by pointing us to the past. Reminding that God has called us to faith, has loved us, and has kept us in the faith (v 1). Reminding that God has promised ***“to keep from stumbling and to present you blameless”*** (v 24) on that day of his glorious return.

So, this we may always remember about Jesus: That he hears our prayer that echoes the thief on the cross, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”*** (Lk 23:42). He does. Jesus remembers you. That he always has been and always will be mindful of you.

He who has all ***“glory, majesty, domin ion, and authority, before all time and now and forever”*** (v 25) remembers us, loves us and keeps us.

He has called us through the waters of Baptism, where he joined us to himself and to all other believers. He continues to love us by feeding us with the fruits of his cross. He promises to keep us in the one true faith by his Word and Spirit until the day we see him face-to-face.

In our Collect for the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we prayed, ***“Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.”*** Jesus does live and reign. He hears our prayers. Therefore, we remember him today and forever.

Jude tells us to remember also: ***“[Build] yourselves up in your most holy faith.”*** This is an encouragement to be built up by God’s Word and Spirit in the faith. ***“[Pray] in the Holy Spirit.”*** This is an encouragement to offer prayer that is informed by God’s Word through which the Spirit works faith.

“Keep yourselves in the love of God.” This is an encouragement to stay in the love God the Father has given us through Baptism. ***“[Wait] for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Mercy is what happens when we do not get what we deserve. This is an encouragement to expect mercy from the Savior even though we deserve to be destroyed by him as judge. This is a look forward to the future.

Having offered encouragement as to how believers themselves should live, Jude then adds three ways believers should live in relation to others, especially ***“those who doubt”*** (v 22). ***“Have mercy on those who doubt.”*** There is only one judge. Jesus allowed himself to be rejected by the world, and his message to the world through you has that same character that can be rejected. This is an encouragement to keep on showing the mercy that Jesus has shown to you no matter what. ***“Save others.”*** Christ has saved us from the wrath of God, snatched us from the destruction we have earned and truly deserve.

Since we are snatched from judgment by his grace, this is an encouragement to let ourselves be used by God to graciously snatch and save others. ***“[Hate] even the garment stained by the flesh.”*** When we were baptized, Christ clothed us in the robe of his own righteousness. How can individuals or congregations knowingly and willingly soil that gift with unrepentant sin? Instead, this is an encouragement not to ***“pervert the grace of our God”*** (v 4) but to hate sin out of love for Jesus.

These are responses to what God has already done for us in Christ. We can't remember without the past. We can't live according to God's Word apart from what God has already done and promises to do. Remember what he has done. He gave his life for you and me. He conquered death. He sent his Spirit that we might believe his promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He has promised to return in glory for us. He has promised to destroy those who do not believe, but he has also promised to save those who do.

Listen to his promise: ***“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”*** (John 14:26).

Jesus remembers you. That’s how you remember him. ***“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen”***