

Sermon: 25th Sunday after Pentecost Series B

Text: Daniel 12:1-3 (3b)

Theme: How to be delivered from the time of distress?

Goal: To assure God's good plan for us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The end of the year is around the corner. The Shopping Centres are packed with people running up and down, looking for gifts and food for the Holy Season. Others are planning their holidays with the children. Can we take a break and look a little further to another end and not just to the anxiety of the end of every year? Due to all these anxieties and stress, it's a good time to stop for a while and to think about and relying on God's plan for us: His good plans for our future.

I – We have a Protector

Prophet Daniel speaks about a distant future in his prophecies. He refers to it several times as “At that time”. We are curious to know when this time will be, like the disciples asked Jesus in our Gospel: “Tell us when will these things happens?” The answer doesn't include a day and an hour; but it is a period till God's good plan for us will be accomplished in its full. It will not be an easy time, as it is described as “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then”. Jesus said almost the same words when he spoke to the disciples: “Because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world – and never to be equalled again” (Mark 13:19).

God's purpose is not to scare us when He prophecies time of great distress. Rather, He wants to encourage us to be on guard, not to give up, but to wait for God's salvation.

The promise given to Daniel is: "At that time Michael the great prince who protects your people will arise." Michael is the commander in chief of God's army – the holy angels. God will never abandon His people, even in the midst of great distress. Psalm 91:11, 12 says: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone." We are not alone in our personal distresses, neither in collective distress like wars, drought, flooding and urban violence. God has His plans for us and he sends His Holy angels to protect us.

More than the angels, we have Jesus Himself looking after us, according to His promise: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19). When we feel alone or unprotected, let us run to where Jesus can be found: in His Word and in the Holy Sacrament.

II – We have a guarantee

And God gives a guarantee to Daniel that His promise is true: "At that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered." I like the image of the book. Like when you were born, your name was registered in an official book of records; and when you were baptized your name was written in the Registration Book of the church; God has His own book where He writes down the name of His elected, one by one. Your name and my name are written there and God knows us by name since we were baptized.

To those whose name is found written in the book there is a big promise: “They will be delivered.” Delivered from what? “But deliver us from evil” we pray at the Lord’s Prayer. Nothing can be worse than the eternal condemnation in hell. And from this Jesus delivered us when He died on the cross and rose again on Easter Sunday. He conquered for us deliverance from sin, from death and from the devil. And we receive these gifts when we believe in Him. Without faith, we are lost. With faith, we are delivered!

Martin Luther, whose birthday was remembered last week (10th November), used to say to himself when he was tempted and was facing times of distress: “I am baptized! I am a child of God!” And this assurance gave him encouragement to go forward in spite of the many difficulties he had to face in his life and ministry.

III – We have a unique promise

The final deliverance will happen on the last day: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” We confess in the Apostles’ Creed: *I believe...in the resurrection of the body.* This is the day of the big deliverance, when even death, the last enemy, will be also conquered. Therefore the Bible likes to call those who have passed away as those “who sleep”. They all will be awakened on the last day, by the sound of the trumpet of God, to be gathered before the throne of God together with all who will be alive when Jesus comes back. “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens” (Mark 13:26, 17).

IV – We have a brilliant future

But God's plan doesn't end at the resurrection. He revealed to Daniel: "Those 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." And Paul wrote: "And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1

Thessalonians 4:17b, 18). "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!" (1 Corinthians 2:9 CEV).

It is far beyond our understanding what God has planned for us. But as a child who trusts in his father or mother when they take him/her on holidays and the child doesn't know what is waiting for him/her, what to expect, - so is it with us. We don't know when we arrive and how it will be. We just walk guided by God and trust that His plans are better than our plans, and that He leads us through a distressing time to the eternal deliverance, eternal holidays. Jesus passed through the biggest distress ever to open the way for us to reach the throne of God. When we follow Him, we can be sure that God's promises will be fulfilled in us as well.

Conclusion: The best-known story about Prophet Daniel is when he was thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6). This helps us to understand his message of deliverance in our text. He experienced a strong deliverance in a very distressing way. Living in the court of pagan kings, he became the highest counsellor of the kings and received several revelations from the Lord. When he wanted to know more and asked God: "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be? He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end...As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance" (Daniel 12:8, 9, 13). This promise is for us as well. "Go your way; and as you have believed, so be it done unto you" (Matthew 8:13). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 15 November 2015