

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus be yours this day. The title for today's sermon is 'Judgment Day' and is based on the Old Testament reading, from Zephaniah chapter 1. Let us pray...amen.

The Day of Judgment is coming for all nations, for all tribes, for each and every person. The Day of Judgment, Judgment Day never sounds good. Today is the 2nd last Sunday of the Church Year, a time when the readings, hymns, and prayers focus on that ultimate day.

Unlike in the six days of Creation, when God created all things good and very good—when God created life; on Judgment Day the Lord God Almighty will return with fire, destruction, and judge that life. In Creation, God created all things holy; on Judgment Day, God will come to unleash His righteous Judgment on the unholiness of His fallen creation.

Today's Old Testament reading, from the Book of Zephaniah, is a warning to the people of Judah some twenty years before a foretaste of Judgment Day would come down on Jerusalem and all Judah. Soon God's righteous judgment would rain down on them for their sinfulness and rejection of Him. But that almost complete destruction of Jerusalem, Judah, and the people therein was like a gentle summer rain compared to what will be unleashed on the Final Judgment Day.

The heavens and earth will be destroyed with fire on Judgment Day (*2 Peter 3:7*). All people will have to stand before God's judgment seat and give an account of all their unforgivable, unpardonable, and all their unrighteous acts, words, and thought we each are guilty of doing. It will be a day of weeping and gnashing of teeth. There will be wailing and rivers of tears. The strongest and the bravest of men, men of valour and battle will be driven down to their knees in anguish and terror.

All the things we love to hold most dear: wealth, property, and business, will be torched and destroyed with the heavens and the earth as the perishable things they are.

Those who are complacent in their faith “**will be spat out by God for being lukewarm, for their being neither hot nor cold. For there are so many who say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, while not realizing that we all, by nature, are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked’** (*Revelation 3:16-17*) before God's judgment seat!

We have no righteousness or holiness of our own to offer God for our sins. By nature you and I are spiritually bankrupt.

But it is not just us, the cities and institutions which seemed inaccessible and unconquerable, the nations which pride themselves on their strength and power, on Judgment Day they will be decimated, burnt, and destroyed.

All people will be silent before the throne of the Lord God Almighty because God's presence demands such behaviour.

To the horror of the unbelieving world, and even some Christians, the Lord is coming no matter how much they want to deny it. And He is coming soon! No one has any excuse for not being prepared. Complacency is lethal. Complacency kills eternally. At the trumpet call (*Matthew 24:31*), Christ will

return in Judgment for all people. **“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.”**(*1 Thessalonians 4:16*) At the Resurrection all people, from every nation (*Matthew 25:31-32*) and every tribe--every person who had ever died will be resurrected, with their soul reunited to their physical body for eternity--and on that day all people will stand before the judgment throne.

Then, as recorded in today’s Gospel reading, each person will have to give God an account on how we used our God-given gifts in our life. God demands results for His glory and for the expansion of His kingdom. As invested money is expected to earn interest and grow; and seed placed in the ground is expected to grow and produce fruit; God’s gifts entrusted to you and I are expected to be used to grow, multiply, and bear fruit to expand the kingdom of God here on earth.

This life, your life is not your own. It is not about you, or what makes you comfortable and what feels good. Scriptures never says that. This life is about living in Christ under the cross, allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you, and using your God-given gifts however best God deems fit. This life is not about earthly comfort, for if you are in Christ the devil and this world will hate you. Jesus promised this to us and His disciples when He said; **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”**(*John 15:18-19*)

Everything good in our lives we received from God. Everything, from our time, to our talents, to all our material possession, are all gifts from God. Everything we have and own is first and foremost the Lord’s entrusted to our care. He gives us these things to manage and use for His glory and to expand His kingdom. If you are not using your gifts for this precise task you are failing. Before God, failure is not an option. Carelessness is condemnable. Laziness is deadly.

So, how are you doing with the gifts God has entrusted to you? What are you doing with them? God demands results. How do your actions measure up?

Now, on our own, and by our own reason and strength we can do nothing. We can only stand guilty before the judgment seat at Christ’s return. Jesus, Himself said; **“apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”**(*John 15:5b-6*) Apart from Christ there is only hell and condemnation.

It is precisely when we come to recognize that by nature we are dead in our sins and enemies of God that we also realize we cannot save ourselves. When we are convicted by the Law we know, by nature, we have nothing to offer God to pay for our sins. Convicted and desperate for the Gospel--some good news--we bow down and set our eyes on the cross. With David and all the saints and say **“For you, O Lord, will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”**(*Psalms 51:16-17*) Recognizing our sin and natural position before God we pray with the two blind men outside Jericho, **“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”**(*Matthew 20:30*)

**“Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.”** (*Psalm 136:26*)

In God’s great love for us, His fallen creation, He sent His Son, Christ Jesus into our fallen world. At just the right time, **“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”** (*Galatians 4:4-5*) God sent Christ Jesus to the cross to die for you, me, and all people, in order to redeem and deliver our sinful, unrighteous, and condemned souls.

For we were **“dead in our trespasses and sins”** (*Ephesians 2:1*), self condemned, and enemies of God (*Romans 5:10*). Despite our unworthiness, Christ came for each one of us. But Jesus didn’t come to teach us a good lesson about what God demands of us under the Law. Jesus didn’t come to abolish God’s Law either. Instead Christ Jesus came to fulfill the righteous demands of the Law (*Matthew 5:17*), and He did just that on the cross and in our place. Jesus didn’t come to be a nice teacher; **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (*1 Timothy 1:15*), you and me. From the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary, Jesus’ eyes were set on the cross of Calvary. Jesus came for you, to take your sins on Himself, to take the full punishment you earned and justly deserve; Jesus came to take the full cup of God’s righteous Judgment each one of us deserves on Himself.

The judgment you and I deserve to hear on Judgment Day, is the judgment Christ took for you and I on the cross. He paid the penalty for all your sins with His own innocent and precious blood and life. Jesus, beaten, tortured, and nailed to a crude Roman cross, also drank the full cup of God’s righteous wrath against your sins and mine. Jesus emptied the cup, drags and all, for you and your salvation. When He finished drinking He proclaimed God’s judgment satisfied. **“It is finished!”** (*John 19:30*) and sealed your salvation with His death.

Then, on the 3rd Day, Jesus rose victoriously from the grave, proclaiming God’s acceptance of His sacrifice for you, and guaranteeing your eternal life in Him.

Jesus proclamation, **“It is finished”** and **“your sins are forgiven”**, resound across time. Paul proclaims how you, **“...having been buried with Jesus in baptism, were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and guilty as sin in your flesh, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”** (*Colossians 2:12-14, slightly modified*)

God adopted you as His own precious child through the waters of Holy Baptism. By water and the Word, God also **“sealed you by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption”** (*Ephesians 4:30*), for Judgment Day. On the day you were baptized, you were washed in Jesus’ blood of the cross, and already declared ‘not guilty’ on Judgment day. On account of Christ’s work for you, and the active working of the Holy Spirit, you freely inherited eternal life.

God marked you with His name: **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (*Matthew 28:19*); in Baptism. Every time you hear God’s name, you can go back to your baptism and Jesus’ proclamation of ‘not guilty’, forgiven, and delivered and saved. Each and every time you hear the words; **“As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (*LSB*,

p.151), Jesus’ proclamation again resounds across time from the cross and empty tomb, through your baptism, from the throne on Judgment Day, and back to you today That proclamation: “your sins are forgiven”, is Jesus’ Word today forgiving you your sins now and for eternity.

You are not forgiven because of what you are doing, or what you have, or will do. You are not forgiven for your piety, or for your choices, or for how well you follow God's Law. You are forgiven solely on account of Jesus Christ and His life, His death, His resurrection and His ascension in your place. ***"When our focus shifts from 'Christ outside of me, dying for me', to 'Christ inside of me, improving me,' then the result is despair."***(Dr. Rod Rosenblatt) Jesus told His disciples: ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."***(John 15:16-17) We don't choose Jesus; He chooses us and works through us.

As for the talents and expectations God has entrusted us with, these are not demands of the Law, rather they are fruits of the Gospel—you could say a natural reaction to the grace given us in Christ. Paul says it most succinctly in his letter to the Ephesians, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."***(Ephesians 2:8-10) Context those words with through Holy Baptism ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."***(Galatians 2:20)

In this new life, created in Christ for good works, and by the working of the Holy Spirit good works do flow from faith. Are these good works, these uses of the gifts God has entrusted to us important? Is what we do, how we use our skills, our time, our talents, and our treasures important? Well, they are absolutely and eternally important for the salvation of your neighbour and those people around you, but these good works do nothing for your salvation, nor can we trust in them because Christ has already done it all. Good works are like apples on an apple tree; they feed others but do nothing for the tree.

So, as scary as Judgment Day sounds, rejoice, and pray it comes quickly. Christ came for you; He died and rose for you, and has already taken the full punishment for all your sins. You are in Christ, thought the waters of Holy Baptism, already redeemed and saved on the Last Day. Christ has covered you with His righteousness. Your sins are already forgiven by Jesus on Judgment Day, and in Him your eternal salvation is assured.

Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!

In Jesus name, amen.

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