

The Fulfillment Of Time

Mark 13:32-37

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 25, 2012 – Last Sunday of The Church Year

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Most of us like surprises – especially nice ones! That’s why it’s important to note how this morning’s text speaks about the kinds of surprises you might expect on that Day when our Lord Jesus comes in glory to judge both the living and the dead. On that day and in that moment when He arrives in our world to bring an end to all things, every promise He ever made will be consummated and fulfilled. God will usher in the never-ending feast of the Lamb and His Kingdom which has no end. But for now, Jesus tells us, you must simply be watchful for His coming – remembering His warning that it could happen at any moment.

If you watch much television you’ve no doubt noticed all the shows that devote themselves to the study of “ancient prophecies” – or the number of people who have made predictions concerning the end of the world. Some years ago, as you might remember, there was a time when all the planets were going to come into alignment with one another – and many were predicting Christ’s imminent return. Do you recall how, at the turn of the 21st Century, the loonies came out of the woodwork saying the end of the world was at hand? But in every instance where people have attempted to predict the time of the End, the Scriptures were ignored, which clearly teach that **no one** knows when this will happen. God’s people are always to be ready lest they fall into spiritual lethargy. The appearance of false teachers, false religions, terrorist attacks, terrorist threats, twenty-four hour news cycles, earthquakes, wars, and famines are to be viewed as Jesus saying: “Wake up! Repent! Get ready! The Time **is** at hand!”

Yet, in spite of all these warnings, you I are so often caught up in day-to-day living that we completely forget about the very real possibility that Jesus **could** show up at any moment. Perhaps you’ve even found yourself scoffing at all this talk of the End, saying – along with those whom Peter quotes in his 2nd Epistle – “Where **is** this coming He promised? Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” Some have even gone so far as to think all this hoopla about Jesus’ return is nothing more than a fairy tale. But friends, when you have such thoughts you need to remember the words of St. Peter, who says: “With the Lord a day is like a thou-

sand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is **not** slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but that all come to repentance.”

And that brings us to the real heart of the matter, for while it’s true that we **are** to be watchful for Christ’s return, it’s not necessarily a thought we relish. After all, coming face to face with the Living God is a frightening thought – and it’s frightening precisely because we have fallen so far short of what He created us to be. Deep down inside we think God may not set aside our youthful indiscretions – and that the sins of the recent past will be no less damning. And so long as this concern about how God **might** deal with our sin clings to us, it’s impossible to face the future with any sure or certain hope. Dear friends, during this time of the Church Year – when God’s Word reminds us that our Lord Jesus could return at any moment – you need to direct your attention once again to the time of His First Coming – when “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who are under Law” – that time when our Savior willingly wrapped Himself in the chains of our sin and paid the ultimate price so that you and I might stand before Him on Judgment Day without stain or blemish.

This profound mystery is expressed most clearly in the words of the Athanasian Creed, which says: “It is necessary to everlasting salvation that we believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God **and** man – God of the substance of the Father, before the worlds – and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world – perfect God **and** perfect Man – who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose on the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead – at whose coming **all** men will rise again with their bodies to give an account.”

The Good News for you, me, and all true Christians is found in the fact that because Christ suffered and died in our place, you won’t receive the judgment you rightly deserve when He comes again. Rather, Judgment Day – your Judgment Day – has already taken

place when Christ died on the cross for the sins of us all. The condemnation you deserved was taken for you by Christ at Calvary. In Him, God's anger toward you was forever appeased. You no longer have anything to fear, because on that Day you'll stand before God robed in Christ's righteousness, for in Baptism you have been "clothed with Christ." Trusting Jesus has done all this, God's promise is that those whose hope is stayed in Him have nothing to fear. And **this** knowledge is what makes the Gospel such a sweet, precious Word.

Consider once again this morning how, on the one hand Christ has been with and one with the Father from eternity, but yet how, in the fullness of time, He was also born of the Virgin. Consider how His first descent from heaven went almost unnoticed, but how His Second Descent from heaven will take place before the eyes of all. Consider how, at His First Coming, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, but how, at His Second Coming, He will be clothed with brilliant light, riding on the clouds of heaven. Consider how, at His First Coming He bore the cross, enduring its shame – but how, when He comes the Second Time, it will be in glory accompanied by hosts of angels. And finally, consider how the words so simply shouted on Palm Sunday at His First coming: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," will be shouted once more without ceasing by the whole of creation when He comes again.

And while these images are marvelous to ponder, the bottom line is that until you and I go to be with the Lord – whether in death or at His Second Coming – you need to re-examine what He wants you to do until that Day. He wants you to receive the time He's given you as a precious gift – to use it wisely in faith toward Him and in service toward others. Think for a moment about some important event in your own life – a marriage, graduation, or the birth of a child. Then consider how the time immediately preceding that event was spent in focused preparation. Your awareness of Christ' Second Coming ought to do the same. Christ has already given you a positive end to anticipate – a blessed goal to define for you the value of time, and a true understanding of what life is all about. Living the life God has given you in Christ, you are to use whatever time you've been given to His glory – to love your neighbor and carry out Christ's mission. Whether you serve God in some capacity here at this Parish, in your job, your family, or elsewhere – He **is** calling you to use that time wisely and faithfully **for Him**.

Secondly, even as you do your best to be a good steward of all God has given you, He is also calling you to be watchful for the time of His return. Here in this text Jesus tells us that the time of His return will be a

like a man going away – who leaves his house and puts his servants in charge – each with an assigned duty – then tells the one at the door to keep watch. Our Lord and Master has gone away too – to return at any moment. And He has entrusted important work to us – and each of you has been given an assigned duty. You are to live, work, witness and confess in the knowledge that He will be coming soon – and that, in His grace, He has equipped you to be a faithful servant. Christ's coming might not be for another 100 years – but then, again, it might be this afternoon. You are simply to be watchful – to keep Christ's return in the forefront of your mind, and to let it guide the way you use the time God has given you.

How do you do that? One way is what you're doing right now – listening to God's Word. There's also study, prayer, family and devotional life – and those times when you come to God's house to hear Him declare through His shepherds that you have been forgiven – when you take into your own mouth and body the blessed Gospel contained in Bread and Wine – when you bring your children before the throne of Grace to receive forgiveness in Holy Baptism – when you daily remember your Baptism, forgive one another for Christ's sake, and live in peace, with joy – and the list could go on and on!

You, dear Christian, you have been privileged to know that "whether in the evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn," Christ **will** return. Washed by His mercy and forgiveness in Baptism and reassured by His Word, you are to be constantly vigilant for that glorious Day of His appearing – for on that Day God has promised sin, death, the devil – and their effect on your life – will be banished forever. On that Day what you now by faith embrace without seeing will be confirmed in your own body as time is brought to its fulfillment and completion, and the joys of the new heaven and earth will be yours eternally – that time when all God's children together celebrate the unending feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end – and all of this **will** happen for Jesus' sake, and for the glory of His name. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.