

“The Big Picture”

There is a danger in giving false warning about an impending disaster. Aesop’s fable about the boy who cried wolf comes to mind. He was given the task of watching over the village’s flock of sheep – but he had this nasty habit of crying wolf, and taking great delight in seeing the villagers come running.

Well, you know how the story goes. One day a wolf really does come – the boy cries “wolf” – but the villagers don’t come, and the sheep are devoured. The moral of the story is that you can only “cry wolf” so many times before people will stop believing your word. We have our own versions in our day – when every news story is “breaking news” and “weather alert days” are as common as well, the weather.

In the Church we have a liturgical calendar that brings us full circle every year. As we come to the end of the Church Year, the focus turns to the “end times” and the Last Day. Then we turn the page and begin a new Church Year – but part of the focus of that first season of the Church Year is the Advent (or coming) of Christ on the Last Day.

Each year the same cry goes out – “the end is near” – “the Lord is coming soon.” I wonder if we become like the villagers who tire of hearing the boy cry wolf – and then pay no attention when the wolf is at the door.

The Lord’s final Advent and the Last Day may seem like something in the future, probably not even in our lifetime – so the temptation is to ignore the message, and focus on the relevant things of the here and now, what we think is “real life.”

The Church repeats the message of the end times and the Last Day because it is REAL. Preachers are not little boys “crying wolf” – they are watchmen set high on Zion’s wall – workmen that the Lord of the Vineyard has put in charge of His business until He returns, giving them the command to “Watch!”

Our Lord has commanded that His Gospel be preached as a testimony to all nations – and then the end will come. We dare not wait until the wolf is at the door before we sound the alarm – walking through this world as if everything is business as usual.

Business as usual in the Church is a constant, repetitive, unceasing preaching of the forgiveness of sins. That's the Lord's business – it's serious business – it's never ho-hum or old hat. He is in the business of forgiving sinners – but that is not a product to be bought or sold – it is to be preached in His name.

The living voice of Christ cries out – warning us of our sin and damnation – so the ears of repentant sinners might hear of His mighty deliverance. The living Body and Blood of Christ is dished out for mouths to receive this good news of salvation in His Holy Sacrament.

This Law and Gospel cry of the Church is not something to become bored with, ignored, or despised. The Church must never be lured away to a “more relevant ministry.” Forgiving sins is the Lord's business – which He conducts in and through His Church, over and over again – so that we poor sinners might be rescued from the perils of our sins.

The Church is stuck on doing only one thing – being the means by which the Lord's forgiveness, life and salvation, are delivered to sinners – preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, until He comes again in glory.

That Gospel and those Sacraments are our only hope in this dark world – because they are our only link with our living Lord. That lowly Gospel and those lowly Sacraments are our only rock and anchor in a world being tossed to and fro by every wind and wave of false teaching – a world reeling with fear, and yet reveling in filth at the same time.

In the midst of all that, the Church is kept on an even keel because we know the big picture – that the Son of God was given over to die a lonely, bitter death on His cross as the payment for our sins – and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world!

Everything in Christ's Church is so arranged – as long as this earth remains – so that repentance and the forgiveness of sins may be proclaimed in His name. That's the only thing that is certain and sure in this ever-changing world, where everything is up for grabs, and hope is nothing more than a wish.

So, we make no bones about it. We do not shrink back – we're lashed to the mast. Come hell or high water – with St. Paul, we are determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Thanks be to God, that Christ and His Gospel are always the same.

Kingdoms come, and kingdoms go, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so, when we hear of wars and rumors of wars – we are not alarmed – because we know the big picture.

The iron curtain comes down, the madman in Iraq is dragged from his spider hole – but a crazy man rears his head in North Korea – and yet, Jesus Christ remains the same forever.

The Soviet Union is torn apart, Yugoslavia is ravaged by ethnic cleansing – but Iran steps to the forefront to put the world on edge – and yet, Jesus Christ remains the same forever.

The arms race is ended, nuclear treaties are signed – but the battle simply moves to cyberspace and outer space – yet Jesus Christ remains the same forever.

Our nation is blessed with advances in technology and wealth – but our families are coming apart at the seams, while our media pedals obscenity and pornography as entertainment – yet Jesus Christ remains the same forever.

We rejoice in the advances of health care and preventative medicine – but a pandemic locks us down and grips us in fear – and yet, Jesus Christ remains the same forever.

On the surface, the preaching of the Gospel and administering the Sacraments of our Lord, may seem boring, repetitious, and irrelevant in the world around us – but it is actually the only hope for mankind.

In these times of turmoil and distress – Christ forgiveness is the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding – a peace that is far greater than that which the world offers. And that's why we come to this place, week after week – to enter into the peace of Christ – in whom we are reconciled to God, and saved for eternity.

As the nations faint for fear of what is coming on the world – the church breathes easily – for we know the big picture.

Dearly beloved, Christ has covered you with His blood – He has set you free from your sin, your guilt and shame – He has rescued you from death – and He will come again to deliver you from the chaos of this world, into His life which knows no end.

And so we continue to cry out – Amen, Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.