

“Someone’s at the Door”

“From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.” We have confessed this truth over and over throughout our lives – but what does it mean? What in the world does the return of Christ for judgment mean? What does the end of the world mean for us who live in this world?

It’s a complex, tough world in which we live. As the hymn says, “fightings within and fears without.” In this world someone is always dropping a bomb – whether from the skies, or in the comment section of social media. Living in this world takes a lot of energy, busy trying to keep our head above water – rather than paying much attention to something so abstract, and totally foreign to our experience – as, the end of the world.

And so, we ask an honest question – what in the world does the return of Christ for judgment – have to do with anything that is real?

St. Mark the Evangelist lays out the answer in our Scripture reading tonight. After revealing all the sobering, terrifying events that will accompany His return for judgment, our Lord reminds His disciples – “when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

Christ’s return is near, right at the gates – He’s at the door! That’s the point, you see – that you and I live each day on the very threshold of eternity. Which means that we are to live in anticipation of the return of Christ for judgment.

But life in this world can be deceiving. It’s easy to think that the end is not near, that there’s plenty of time. After all, that’s what our experience tells us is real. I already have my golf vacation penciled in for next June – and no doubt, you also expect to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, and other things on your 2021 calendar.

The truth that Jesus reveals is that the end is near, and we don’t know when the Last Day will be – but we go on living, as if, life will go on. That’s the way we operate – reality is what we can see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and experience in our lives.

And so, like the rich young man to whom Jesus spoke – we think that life consists of the abundance of our possessions – that success is measured in terms of net worth – that contentment can be achieved by accumulating more and more trappings of “the good life” – that happiness can be purchased, or produced by our work and ingenuity.

The end of all things helps us to see right through these deceptions. For all the material things in this world (from cell phones to Chevy Silverados, to a house on an acreage) – every last thing in this world will one day vanish into oblivion – it will melt with fire and fervent heat, the Bible says.

The disciples of Jesus were impressed with the temple Herod had constructed in Jerusalem. And it was impressive! It was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Some of the stones in its foundation were 40 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide. The central feature of the temple area, the Holy Place, was sheathed in gold – and Josephus, the historian, says that when the sun was shining on it, you had to shield your eyes. It was an impressive sight, for sure.

One of Jesus’ disciples said to Him – “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” And Jesus said to him – “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

And it was so. In 70 A.D. the great roman general Pompey entered the city and destroyed it – tearing down that magnificent temple – and, if you visit Jerusalem today, all you will see is parts of the outer foundation.

“So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates.” In other words, the Last Day begins with the last days. Jesus told His disciples that these things would begin to unfold in their very lifetime. “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until these things take place.”

And that’s exactly what happened. Judgment day began at the cross. The final day of judgment was ushered in when Jesus breathed His last and said, “It is finished.”

Everything has been fulfilled. All is now ready. And the message we have heard all our lives is the same one preached by Jesus Himself – “the time is at hand, and the kingdom of God is fulfilled. Repent, and believe the gospel.”

We do not need to go to heaven to get forgiveness, life and salvation – because the Lord of all life has brought it here to us on earth. In His very body, all the fulness of God dwells. When Jesus taught His disciples, God was teaching. When Jesus dined with His disciples, God was sitting at table with them. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, God was being given over to death. And when Jesus died, God died.

In other words, the ultimate sacrifice – the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – “it is finished.” Jesus is the One on whom the Father unleashed all His wrath against the sin of the world – so that all who believe in Him, need not fear the wrath to come.

Time is running out, for sure – but we are not afraid. We know that we are only visitors on earth, as the Scriptures say. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14).

But in the meantime, we’re not twiddling our thumbs. With Luther, we can say that if we knew for certain Christ were coming back tomorrow, we’d plant a tree today! We live life full steam ahead – full tilt in the joy, confidence, and freedom that Christ gives – because we do not need to wait until the Last Day to enjoy the blessings of heaven.

Someone’s at the door – and He who will come one day to be our judge – comes each day as our Savior and our Lord. “Here I am,” He wrote to His church in Laodicea in the book of Revelation. “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and He with me.”

That’s what He does in this place. Jesus is here uniquely and especially in this place through His means of grace. In His Holy Word we hear His voice – and in His Holy Supper, He comes to eat with us, and we with Him.

It's true, that in this world we have tribulations – but we are of good cheer – for Jesus Christ, the righteous, has overcome the world. And He's at the door. Not only someday in the future when He brings this world to its end – but also today.

In His Word and in His Sacraments – you and I, in our real world of real struggles, heartaches, fears and afflictions – have a real hope. Jesus stands at the door – and here and now, and there and then – we have a doorway from time into eternity.

One day we shall see Him face to face – but even now we have His presence, and His peace. Already now, we have forgiveness, life and salvation – in Christ Jesus – who is near, right at the door.

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20).