

FIXED DATES

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Matthew 25:31

In school, especially now in the final days leading up to report cards, you'll see students lined up at the teacher's desk begging pleading or negotiating. "I can't hand in my paper today sir. I had a headache, family crisis, job interview, or you fill it in. At the court house, citizens summoned for jury duty will line up in some special line, whether in person or online, "I can't appear in court November 13th". I've got a 60th wedding anniversary, a house closing or a colonoscopy or well you fill it in. At the doctor's waiting room, at least my doctor's because it's a large centre, there's three secretaries answering phones and people are saying, "I'm sorry I can't make it in for my physical scheduled 6 months ago because the baby sitter bailed out, or the TTC is on strike or ironically enough "I'm simply too sick" or you fill it in. Yes, it happens at the pastor's desk also. And I'm not too happy about it, and sometimes I wish I could charge the "no show up fee" my doctor would charge me if I didn't show up. It seems that someone's phoned the house to cancel about five minutes after I've left. But things happen. And when we're about to get most judgmental about it all I'm convinced that God sends adversity into our lives so we find ourselves at the other end of the line looking to reschedule, begging, negotiating or pleading for mercy to move that date or push back that deadline.

But there is an appointment with date and a time which is non-negotiable. It is a date we cannot schedule. And if you think that transportation might be an issue, or a plausible excuse, well, think again, for God's Word tells us that the "angels will take us there". It is "Judgment Day". And as we sang, "It is surely drawing near". When God has made up his mind he has made up his mind. Nothing in heaven or on earth can stop it.

It sounds absolutely fearful as we sang:

*The day is surely drawing near,
When Jesus God's anointed,
In all His power shall appear.
As Judge whom God appointed.*

*Then fright shall banish idle mirth,
And flames on flames shall ravage earth
As Scripture long has warned us.*

We shall hear the calamity as surely as Noah and his family heard the last gasps and pounding of fists on the shut doors of the Ark as the waters rose. We shall hear the calamity as surely as Lot heard it as he ran from Sodom, cries amidst the falling fire and brimstone.

But we shall hear the tumult as a trapped man under his car wreck hears the tumult of the sirens and screeching tires of the emergency vehicles gradually growing louder. He hears it and says "Help is on the way?" We shall hear the tumult as prisoners trapped in a castle dungeon hear the siege equipment and the pounding of canon and men dying on the walls. St. Michael the Archangel, the multitudes of heavenly armies, and the Lord of Hosts who is with them will soon grant us final deliverance.

We shall look up for our redemption draweth nigh.

We shall look up and give thanks for evil shall be vanquished in a total, complete way. Right now we look for momentary movements of society shifting away from evil. A peace treaty is signed. A law is repealed. A murder caught. But on the Day, evil is vanquished in a complete and total way.

And in short order, when the dust settles, the Lord separates the sheep from the goats.

Christian, he has called you his sheep from the moment of your baptism. We sing how "We are Jesus' little lambs". At baptism we were given "the robe of righteousness" with words mindful of the text before us this morning: "So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

We stand without fear. Our past sins are forgiven and hidden by the blood of Christ and continue to be forgiven and hidden as often as we return to the grace bestowed through a living baptism. God through Christ forgives and forgets our sin never to brought up again even on judgment day. We hear the destruction of this world with the same comfort that the trapped man hears the clanging of a hammer. The Lord comes for us with an inheritance.

Here is one of the most important words in the whole reading. An inheritance is a gift. An inheritance is given based on relationship. It is not based on what we have done or have not done. The works are mentioned to be certain. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me". These are works rendered on the basis of the inheritance. God might judge us on such good works, but it is a judgment with "faith alone" which is at the root of any good work. As Scripture says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God".

The works of the righteous come out of their relationship with Christ. They feed the hungry. They give drink to the thirsty. They welcome the stranger. They visit the prisoner. Christians are you're lives filled with such activities? Naturally, as those possessing the righteousness of Christ, they ought to be. It is not without some scheduling difficulties. It's not without struggle. But in doing these things we are doing them unto Christ. "Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren you do them unto me" is what our Lord teaches us today.

We live in a place where it is easy to find the hungry, see the stranger, and visit the prisoner. Our nearest jail is the West End detention facility 11 minutes away on Disco Rd. We live in a city where there are more newcomers who are strangers to this land than perhaps anywhere else. We live in a place of actual hunger.

Before I got into it I could hardly believe it. Forty percent of those accessing our food bank have reported being hungry and going without food for at least one day in the last month.

Sometimes I get the most incredulous look when I suggest that we need to be a true family to those in our newcomers in our midst. Don't they have family or friends etc? Well no, is what I say. Many flee their homelands with nothing, not even family. They are alone or oftentimes alone with children. The only family they will know is their brothers and sisters in Christ. As for the prisoners, can any be sympathetic? Jesus was and thought we ought to visit them. After all, many biblical people such as John the Baptist and the apostle Paul ended up in prison. Paul was incarcerated many places but perhaps the worst was the Mamertine prison which was literally a hole.

True faith leads us to do such works. And in doing them we not only minister to those in need, we find the Christ in them.

The unrighteous cannot find meaning outside themselves. They ignore the poor, the hungry and the prisoner. They do not have the relationship with Christ. They are sent into everlasting darkness.

We must not have any note of triumphalism here. That is, we ought not rejoice at the fall of others. But rather, we see in this text the seriousness of faith or lack of faith. It is a tragedy to be pondered and proclaimed with a heaviness of heart. Our attitude should be that of Christ. When Jerusalem rejected the Gospel, our Lord rather than being vengeful, was rather moved to weep. St. Paul in contemplating the alternative afterlife could only speak "with tears" of those headed for damnation. God Himself has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. 33:11) In short, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) The fires were not originally created for man but for "the devil and his angels".

Judgment Day! It is the appointment which we cannot reschedule. We of course meet that day immediately upon our deaths. But there is a public accounting of the Lord's decision on the "Last Day". It is based on our relationship with Him. I suppose that is why "The Son" rather than the "Blessed Trinity" sits on the throne to judge. Judgment centres around our relationship to the life, death and resurrection of the person of Christ. And if we still be alive at the Lord's Coming, the process takes place as one event. We who know the Lord ought not fear though it be a tumultuous time. We ought not fear its contemplation which is the theme of these last couple of weeks of the church year before Advent begins November 28th. But rather, we ought to spur one another on to good works because we know the fragility of our human condition. We know what those works ought to be and that it is ultimately the Lord whom we serve. We also are sobered with the reality of hell. Proclaiming the Gospel is of utmost importance. Indeed, the day is surely drawing near. May we live lives as if we believe it's coming tomorrow.

Amen.