

“The Great and Magnificent Day”

Acts 2:1-21

The people of God, and even many outside of Christ’s Church, have always been interested in the concept of the last days and what, why, how, and when this world will end – especially the “when” part. And throughout history a number of people have been convinced that they are able to predict the will of our Father in heaven. They, of course, have all been wrong – obviously.

Who can forget the Mayan Calendar predictions of 2012? The hysteria as the year 2000 approached and all the crazy predictions of Y2K? All the world, it seems, is waiting to see if Christ is going to come and do something. If only these same multitudes of people would have the same excitement concerning what it is that He has already come and done.

Joel speaks of the “great and magnificent day” when this world will end and God will usher in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. But I tell you that the world has not needed to wait around to see Christ doing something great or magnificent. He continues to do His tremendous, magnificent work throughout the world and in our lives today.

Christ is doing amazing things here and now. You want to see Christ doing amazing, magnificent work, come by this week during Vacation Bible School. He is also doing tremendous work in far away places like Africa. Just recently, I read an article written by a pastor from Indonesia. Indonesia

has the largest Muslim population in the world. This pastor was a former Muslim. He, along with 10% of his fellow countrymen, are now Christian.

There are more than 250 million people in Indonesia, on average, 2 million Muslims in Indonesia become Christian every year. That is one every 15 seconds – even though Christians are persecuted. The Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is being proclaimed and being heard.

We celebrate Pentecost: the coming of the Holy Spirit; the day the Christian church was born. The day the Gospel was proclaimed by the disciples to sinners of many nations in many different languages. They believed, they were baptized, and they came to know Christ. It is through the church that the world gets to see Christ in action. It is in Baptism that the Old Adam is crucified and buried with Christ and eternal life begins. We have been raised to a new life. When that happened, that was a great and magnificent day.

Eight weeks before Pentecost, Jesus' work really got going. He certainly did work when it came to preaching, teaching, healing, performing miracles and all those wondrous events of His three year ministry. But the work for which He was born into this world was to suffer and die on the cross as the lamb of sacrifice. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Then after that most gracious offering and even more wonderful victory over death and the grave on Easter morning, Christ lets us know that His work of salvation is finished, but His work in our lives and the life of the church is ongoing. Several weeks ago in our Gospel reading, if you remember, Jesus told His disciples that His miracles and healings were nothing compared to the miracle of the spread of the Gospel and the healing

of the multitude of souls through the Word of God and the words of God's people as the Holy Spirit would guide and grow the church. And we talked about the 10's of millions of Lutherans in Africa in particular – that is one of the great miracles of our lifetime.

Then, a week ago Thursday, as we celebrated Ascension Day, we heard Luke's words with which he addressed a man named Theophilus about the work of Jesus Christ as Luke had written to him in his Gospel and was now writing to him in the book of Acts. He wrote, "In my former book, Theophilus (that is, the Gospel of Luke), I wrote to you about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taken up to heaven."

What Jesus did during His years on earth was the beginning of His work. The victory was complete through the cross and the empty grave. But Christ continues His work through His church. As Martin Luther said, "Christ could have died 1000 times and it would be of no use to us if we had never heard about it."

In Christ's continued work in His Church on earth, we see the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy. Joel had said, "In the last days, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all people." Even though Peter was able to preach to those God-fearing Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia...Phrygia and Pamphylia, etc., even though he did preach to people from all over the known world, this was only the beginning of the work of Christ and His church.

We are living in the last days, just as Peter and all the early Christians were living in the last days. Although it seems as if the last days started a very long time ago, we need to remember that the Lord has always been patient and doesn't do everything in what we think is a timely manner.

Every generation of Christians has seen the signs of the last days as our Lord describes them. Just in the past few years, a book became popular called “The Four Blood Moons” which predicted that the grouping of four lunar eclipses which cause the moon to appear reddish in color during 2014 and 2015 would not bring about the end of the world, but would bring about calamity followed by a time of blessing. Oh how I love vague predictions of the future! Of course, there were some who thought the calamity of 2015 would be the end of the world. But it is really hard to sell your next book when you miss on the “end of the world” prediction.

There is certainly the time when Christ will come. He will come in the time appointed by our heavenly Father, and this world will end. Until then, the work of the church continues. Every day on which Christ does not return is an opportunity for you to speak of the great and magnificent work Christ has done in bringing you out of darkness and into light. You were once dead in your sins, you had no knowledge of God, and were in need of Baptism. And now, as John says, “rivers of living water” flow forth.

Eternal life is not some far off dream. Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, is here today. The Christian Church, born on the Day of Pentecost, is wherever God’s people are gathering around His Word and Sacraments.

He has begun His good work in us, and He will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord. Until that day, we proclaim the Good News of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that one day He will return. And that day will be great and magnificent because, as the prophet Joel said, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Amen.