

## “Today, You Will Be With Me In Paradise”

Luke 23:27-43

Last week, I mentioned that there is no victorious, abundant life promised during our time on earth. Our Old Adam is always concerned about what happens in time. Our Old Adam is continually frustrated that God does not act in the timeliness that we desire. We ask, “Why is God slow in answering our prayer? Why is God slow in ushering in the Last Day?” Just remember that God promised Abraham that he would have a son; Isaac didn’t come along for another 25 years (when his wife Sarah was well past the age of child-bearing).

God’s promises come with a guarantee that He will keep His promise. But He does not come with the guarantee of when He will keep His promise. And the fulfillment of His promises always has to do with eternity, not time. Our victory comes in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Until then, we will continue to mark time.

Today, we celebrate the Final Sunday of the Church Year, the Sunday of the Fulfillment, sometimes called Christ the King Sunday. We mark time according to days, weeks, years. This is not a bad thing. This is just our reality here in time. And on this day we celebrate our victorious, glorious King who reigns for all eternity.

What is victory for our King? What is glory? For Christ, it was entering into time as the child of Mary. The prophet Isaiah had foretold “the virgin will be with child, and they will call His name Immanuel – which means ‘God with us.’” And Jesus was born 700 years later. God keeps

His promise, but there was no guarantee of “when” He will keep His promise.

Our victorious, glorious King entered into time (in those **days**, Caesar Augustus issued a decree). But His victory and glory was not what was expected – He was mocked, beaten, nailed to the cross, with the only crown being made of thorns. It is there we see His victory, His glory, as He paid the penalty for our sin and is the first fruits of the resurrection.

For those caught up in this world of time, it would be logical to assume that Jesus must have done this (He must have made this sacrifice) so that His followers can prosper and reign over this world. Paul says in our Epistle lesson that: “by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.” All the worldly power comes from Him – and He calls us His own. He is in us. His Holy Spirit has made your body His temple. He feeds you with His own flesh and blood. He has not abandoned you. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” says the Lord.

So what does Jesus (our victorious, glorious King who entered this world of time); what does He promise that we will have here in this life? We heard it last week, “before the end comes, ‘they **will** lay their hands on you and persecute you . . . some of you they **will** put to death . . . You **will** be hated by all for My name’s sake.’” This week, we hear Jesus say, “weep for yourselves and for you children, for behold the days are coming . . .”

Where there is time, there is no glory as defined by the world around us. There is no victorious, abundant life promised here on earth. We either grow old and die or we die before we get old. There is no place in Scripture where God has made promises otherwise. God’s promises always have to do with eternity. Our victory comes in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

As I was preaching about this last week, I was thinking to myself, I am never going to become an internet sensation if this is my message. Then again, that is not the goal. The message, preaching Christ and Him crucified, is the goal of Christ's church. There is no other Gospel. There is no other good news. Paul says, "If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are to be pitied more than all men" [1Cor. 15]. If there is no resurrection of the body and life everlasting; if there is no eternity to come; what a waste of time gathering here would be.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, and I quoted it last month in the newsletter, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." Either, this is a complete waste of time, or there is nothing more important we could be doing with our time right now. Those are really the only two options.

We have a victorious, glorious King. And He has called you His own. And He has made your body the temple of His Holy Spirit. And He feeds you with His own flesh and blood. So what does our victorious, glorious King promise? His promise to you in this world of time is that on the day you die, unless Christ returns first, He will speak the same words of promise He spoke to the thief on the cross. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." But if we are blessed to be alive when Christ does return, it would be appropriate for Him to say those words also.

And that will be the last day, the last moment of time you will ever have to consider. Eternity is timelessness. For all eternity, there will be no worry; there will be no fear. The prophet Zechariah describes the new Jerusalem as "a city without walls." There is no need for walls, because there is nothing to fear – no thief, no army, no flood, no storm.

The only fear will be the fear of the Lord. The reverent awe and majesty of God who brought His people out of the great tribulation, washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

As the Lamb of God is being sacrificed on the altar of the cross, the repentant thief hanging next to Him expresses the connection of faith and the fear of the Lord. He rebukes the mocking thief saying, "Do you not fear God?" As was mentioned last week, in our liturgy we recite Ps. 130, "If You, O Lord, kept a record of sin, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared." Forgiveness creates the fear of the Lord. Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The fear of the Lord, the reverent awe of the majesty and authority of God, goes hand in hand with faith. You cannot separate the two.

As we gather this day and turn all of our attention to the coming of Christ the King on the Last Day, it is with fear and trembling that we pray "Thy Kingdom come" or "Come Lord Jesus." You do realize that both of those prayers have End Time aspects.

"Thy Kingdom come" is a prayer for Christ to come and preserve and enlarge His Church on earth (the kingdom of grace.) But it is also a prayer for Christ to usher in His kingdom of glory (the church triumphant). And "Come Lord Jesus" is more than just a Lutheran prayer for there to be blessings upon good casseroles.

The day is coming when there will be no more days. Christ has promised that He will return amid the trumpets of angels. That is certain. When will this happen? Only God the Father knows. Whether or not this happens in our lifetime, the promise is guaranteed. It could be the day the Lord calls you or me out of this life; it could be on the Last Day. But there will come a day when Christ our Lord will say, "today, you will be with Me in Paradise. Amen.