

THE SECOND-LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR / TRINITY 26

Text: St. Matthew 24:15-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

There are many misconceptions about Christianity in the world today, and because we live in the world, there are as well, nearly as many misconceptions among we who call ourselves Christian; not the least of which is our perception of just who our LORD truly is. I do not mean “*who*” as in who it is we are to fear, love, and trust, above all things; I pray we all know that JESUS is our LORD and GOD who died on the Cross to save us. Rather, by “*who*” I mean the character or persona of the One we call “*LORD*”—our concept or perception of just who JESUS is and what He is like and how we are to approach Him.

In C. S. Lewis’ book, “*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*”, one of the children, the little girl, Lucy, inquires of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about the character of Aslan the king. If you are unfamiliar with the story, Aslan is the symbolic messianic character in the series of stories and just happens to be a lion. Lucy asks, “*Is he quite safe?*” Mrs. Beaver answers, “*...if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.*” To which Mr. Beaver adds, “*Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.*”

There is nothing “*safe*” about being in the presence of ALMIGHTY GOD, just ask Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the high priest and nephews of Moses, or Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who in His righteous judgment the LORD caused the earth to swallow alive along with their families, or Uzzah, against whom GOD’s wrath burned for his act of disobedience in merely reaching out to steady the Ark of the Covenant which seemed about to fall as the oxen which we pulling the cart on which it was carried stumbled; Uzzah’s punishment was death.

No, there is nothing “*safe*” about our LORD, but He is good. Not “*good*” like a bowl of ice cream or your favorite food, and not simply *nice*, as if He is a *nice guy*, but good as in pure, holy, just, righteous. He is, after all, the King and King of kings. He is GOD, I tell you.

Let me be a little more clear about the word “*safe*.” Certainly GOD calls us to come to Him for safety. He promises to provide us with all that we need to support this body and life. He loved the world in such a way that He sent His only begotten SON into the world to save the world and us; that whosoever would believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life. He is our ever present Help in times of trouble, and would have us approach Him in confidence and boldness as dear children approach their dear father. He is gracious and merciful to all who will believe in Him. For us, He defeated sin, Satan, and the grave through His innocent suffering and death, and His triumphant resurrection on Easter morning.

All of that is true, and from this aspect GOD is “safe.” Indeed, He is more than safe. But I caution you, one must never forget: over and above all things, He is the King; He is GOD and always will be GOD!

So, it is, that to be in the presence of GOD demands reverence and not the contempt of familiarity. Therefore, He is not our drinking buddy. He is not our teammate. He does not play soccer, football, or baseball with us. He does not wink at us and pat us on the head turning a blind eye to our sins with a thumbs up and a big toothy grin—especially the sin of unbelief. No, GOD is just—completely and totally righteous and just.

Oh, and one more thing, when He returns on the Last and Final Day He will be your Judge.

Therefore, make no mistake, while the first Advent of our LORD was for the purpose of salvation, His second Advent shall be for the purpose of separating the sheep from the goats. It shall be as Judge, not SAVIOR, because the time of mercy for the unrepentant shall have come to an end. Therefore, hear and believe the words of the HOLY SPIRIT as we read them in the Book of Hebrews, *“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the LORD. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living GOD.”*

Thus, with this understanding we have just confessed, *“And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead”*, the recitation of our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. And in like manner, the entire true Church on Earth believes and confesses this truth of our LORD JESUS, who is the CHRIST, the Second Person of the HOLY TRINITY. We confess that JESUS is GOD, and so also, do we confess the coming Day of Judgment.

So, be warned! JESUS CHRIST is returning, and Judgment Day is coming. Whether you truly believe what you confess or not, there is no hiding from it, there will be no stopping it; and when that Day comes, there will be no escaping it. There will be no rapture, no unbelievers left behind for a second chance to save themselves, no excuses nor rain-checks will be accepted.

Let our LORD’s words stand as a warning, for no man knows the hour or day when GOD’s judgment will be upon us; not Hollywood producers and movie makers; not Nostradamus; not any pagan priest in Mayan temples; no politician in the halls of Congress, no scientist, nor Christian heretic—no man knows the hour or the day! For the Day of CHRIST’s return *“will come like a thief in the night.”*

The Day of Judgment is coming, and on that great and final Day ten thousand times ten thousand, people beyond number, will stand before the Judge, and there, before the Judgment Seat of GOD, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD.

All will stand before the throne of the SON OF MAN and hear His verdict. And when they do, there will be only two alternatives to what one will hear; either one will hear JESUS say, *“Come, you blessed of My FATHER, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of*

the world.” or “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” There is no middle ground, no alternate ending.

On the Day of Judgment, our LORD will separate the sheep from the goats. On that Day there will be no social or racial distinctions, no preference by class or wealth, no neutral people. Thus, every person in the world will inevitably find him or herself in either one or the other of the two assemblies—either sheep or goat—without escape, in the former; with no desire to escape, in the latter.

This separating will be the first act of the Judgment to come—it will be the fixing of an impassable gulf between Heaven and Hell. The sheep, whom the King calls the blessed of His FATHER, are those that followed the Great Shepherd, JESUS, and willingly heard His voice. They are the believers whom GOD has promised will inherit His Kingdom as kings and priests.

The goats, on the other hand, are those who refused to bend to His gentle rule, who refused the grace of GOD in His Gospel. They are the unbelievers, the hypocrites among the Christians, and the entire godless world. Being cursed, not by GOD the FATHER, but rather by their own deeds, their inheritance is *“the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*

Therefore, repent! Throw yourself at the feet of the only One who can save you. Lie prostrate before Him at the foot of His Cross, and there be washed in the flood of His Holy and precious Blood as it rushes forth from His pierced side. Come to the only place of safety; the place where your LORD was lifted up for the purpose of drawing all nations unto Himself. Look up into the face of GOD and see there the limitlessness of His love for you, and receive His peace which passes beyond all human understanding.

Our sins and the Law of GOD tell us that we are goats by nature. We have not done what GOD’s Law demands of us, and whatever we have done will never be, and can never be, good enough.

Still, Baptism and the Gospel tell us that we are sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock. We are marked with the Sign of the Cross, the seal of Him who died for the sins of the world in our place. Goats, you see, cannot make themselves into sheep. To become a sheep, the goat must die. The goat must be drowned in the waters of Baptism and be raised to new life as a sheep. In the baptismal water, the goat is buried in the death of JESUS, the very Lamb of GOD who takes away the sin of the world, and is resurrected a sheep in the life of the Lamb who lives.

Therefore, once you *were* a goat, but now you are safe; you are judged by CHRIST to be a sheep of the GOOD SHEPHERD who guards and protects His flock. He guards you with His Cross and protects you with His sacrificed Body and Blood. He does not judge you by what you do, but by what He has done in you and for you. Therefore, He does not judge you by what you have done or by what you may have left undone, but by what you are in JESUS CHRIST. Therefore, when GOD looks at you He does not see a goat; instead, JESUS sees you as an unblemished lamb. He does not see what you once were, He sees you as you now are in Him—a forgiven child of GOD.

Therefore dear friends know this, you do not inherit the Kingdom of GOD by good works. Your so-called good works could never earn your salvation. The Kingdom of GOD is already yours by faith. So *“come you blessed of My FATHER, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

Come! Come, here, to the altar, before the throne of the Judge. Bend your knee in reverent worship. Receive Him on your tongue and receive from Him absolution in His True Body and True Blood given and shed for you. Confess with your tongue that JESUS CHRIST is your LORD and GOD, and hear Him say, *“... come you blessed of My FATHER, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* *“For I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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