

# SECOND TO LAST SUNDAY

November 18 2018 • D.M. Kerns

Daniel 7:9-14

2 Peter 3:3-14

Matthew 25:31-46

## ***Standing...***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

For some, what our lessons teach this morning is a great comfort...

For others, you'll regret being here.

I've lived with these lessons just about every waking moment for the last two weeks, with my only escape from them being sleep.

You will live with them for less than 15 minutes.

So, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

## ***Sitting...***

The task Pr. Bruss and I have before us during these last three weeks of the Church year is to focus your attention on a fundamental doctrine of Christianity—  
a doctrine confessed in all three Ecumenical creeds.

And even though most are complacent about it, fading from one's thoughts before pulling out of the parking lot, the Apostles and the early church were fervent in their expectation of the end of all things.

This sinful world won't last forever.

God brought the earth forth out of water, as St. Peter mentions in our Epistle lesson, and as St. Peter also declares, He will bring it to an end through fire.

After which the new heavens and new earth are created.

God's Word started it all in motion (*creatio orginialis*).

God's Word keeps it all in motion (*creatio continua*), and

God's Word will bring it to a close.

But before the heavens pass away with a roar...

and the heavenly bodies dissolve,

before the earth and all its works go up in smoke,  
 Christ will gather all the living and the dead,  
 to make a final and eternal separation.

This separation is between the saved and the damned,  
 between those who believe and those who scoff,  
 between those who are His children,  
 and those who are His enemies.  
 No one will escape it,  
 and nothing will change it.  
 This day was set in stone  
 before the foundations of the world were laid.

It staggers the mind, really...  
 but Jesus is returning to judge every man, every woman and every child—  
 everyone who has ever lived,  
 doing so with an unswerving judgment,  
 but He wants to save you.  
 In fact, He already has.

Permit me to go back—all the way back to the Garden, where Adam and Eve,  
 along with the Devil, are gathered around a tree—  
 a tree whose fruit is off limits.  
 Eating from any of the trees of the Garden, including the Tree of Life,  
 was no problem—*Bon appétit*.  
 But eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil...  
 don't go there. Don't even think about it.

Now remember—at this point—the pinnacle of God's creation,  
 Adam and Eve—are made in the image of God—what's called the *imago Dei*.  
 This means Adam and Eve are the way they are supposed to be,  
 rightly related to God—rightly related to the rest of creation.  
 If we were to be in their presence, for a mere moment,  
 we would immediately break the command to not covet—  
 for we would crave what they have.  
 Being made in the *imago Dei*,  
 Adam and Eve are in sync with everything—  
 and the statement they live by is,  
 "Eat of this tree—(the tree they stand before)—  
 and you shall surely die."

But the Devil offers them another statement...

an alternative to what they've previously known.

"You will not die," he says.

"For if you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will be like God."

Wow—this sounds so freeing—so liberating!

So, what if it comes from the Devil? He seems authoritative enough.

And it's at this moment that everything hangs in the balance.

Statement A (right) from God stands against Statement B (left) from the Devil.

Who makes the better offer?

Which one is more reasonable?

(right) Will Adam and Eve listen to God,

sticking with the Tree of Life and the *imago Dei*, heeding Statement A...

or (left) will they grab the alternative presented to them

and go the Devil's route?

Steeping back for just a moment...

You know, this is completely inconceivable—Adam and Eve have everything, yet they are tempted to cast aside all that God has given them.

We can't make any sense of this—the "why" is not given.

Yet, what they do, in believing Statement B,

and going with what the Devil presents,

affects them, and everyone else since—

including you.

They rebel—

thumbing their nose at God,

taking the path diametrically opposed to God,

pursuing instead what they want,

desiring to be their own god.

God foresaw this rebellion.

Thus, even before the world was made,

God included the end—the very end—the *telos*—in His plans.

And everything moves to that end.

Mankind would be doomed, unless Someone intervened.

And that Someone is the *agnus Dei*—the Lamb of God—

whose mission was to restore what was lost—to restore Mankind to the *imago Dei*...

to rescue all not simply from trials and hardship on earth,

but to rescue all from the place prepared for the Devil and his angels.  
 See, Hell is where the Devil and his angels go, not humanity.  
 And the *agnus Dei*—Christ Jesus our Lord—  
 would do this work of redemption even in our pathetic,  
 horrible, and unpardonable rebellion.

So, how did He do it? Certainly not as anyone would expect.

The *agnus Dei* came in meekness.

Around whispers of scandal,

He was born in obscurity placed in a lowly manger.

Growing up to eat and drink with sinners.

And eventually betrayed and delivered up to sinful, plotting false priests.

He was condemned to death as a criminal on a cross.

Harmless really—nothing to fear.

But in doing so,

The God-Man suffered the death and condemnation  
 rebellious sinners earned for themselves.

Having made atonement for the world,

paying the wages of sin by His own death,

the Lord Jesus Christ, risen and alive in His Body, as a Man,

ascends to the Father.

And ever since then, we have been living in the Last Days,

not knowing when He will come again in glory,

but knowing that He will surely do so.

During this time, between His ascension and His return,

the nations have only known Christ in His meekness,

which is why He's so easy to mock,

so simple to scoff,

so funny to ridicule and so common to dismiss altogether.

But this, beloved, is not weakness. It's mercy.

For He comes to us in a way...

that we might receive Him without being destroyed.

He comes to us now in meekness by Word and Sacrament—

again...not in a way anyone would expect—

beckoning you, wooing you, to repentance and faith.

That you might listen to Him and His messengers.

That you might be washed in the waters of holy baptism,

which is how the *imago Dei* is brought directly to you...  
 That you might be absolved of your sin,  
 fed at His holy altar,  
 and live in love and forgiveness.  
 We live in this time of invitation.  
 And why is that?

Why must He operate like this for so long?

Because, beloved, Jesus doesn't want any goats. Not a one.  
 He wants nothing but sheep,  
 with everyone gathered on His right—including you,  
 leaving the only ones frustrated to be the Devil and his angels.  
 That is what He wants.

But He won't get it, will He? No...

It won't be just sheep, will it? (smh)

There will be plenty of goats.

Placed on His left.

Judged.

And cast into a place never prepared for them...

But why?

Because He said through the lips of His pastors,

"Believe on Jesus," and they said, "I'd rather not."

He said through the lips of His pastors,

"Be Christ's beloved" and they said, "I'm good."

He said through the lips of His pastors,

"Take and eat" and they said, "I'm full" or, "It's only bread" or "Maybe later."

He said through the lips of His pastors,

"Baptize your children and teach them the Christian faith"

and they said, "Hey, kids, there's a game on!"

And He said through the lips of His pastors, "There is coming a Day of judgment"

and they said, "I'll take my chances."

When that Day arrives the goats will protest.

They will proudly stand by the works they've done—

thinking they've done enough to get into heaven.

But there is no appeal.

In rejecting Christ's gospel of mercy and with no faith to be found,  
 all they can do is be judged by the strictness of the Law.

The goats say, "But that's not fair!"

Trying to blame or castigate Christ for having the audacity to judge them.

But this is entirely fair—for He gives them what they want.

He sees what's hidden to us, and gives them exactly what they want.

Again, sin robbed Mankind of the *imago Dei*.

The *agnus Dei*—the lamb of God—

restores it, and through holy baptism delivers it directly to you (Ro. 6:4).

and since grace has now been given,

one lives in mercy towards others,

because Jesus really does care about that.

But the goats—

they care nothing of grace given nor of mercy lived towards others.

Nothing.

So, when it comes to this Day,

this Day of reckoning,

Christ gives them what they want.

It's completely inconceivable, isn't it?

For these goats on His left to have cast aside all that God has promised,  
done and provided for them.

But for the sheep...He gives you exactly what you want too.

You won't look upon this Day with trepidation.

Because His angels will gather you up and set you on His right,  
where He does not condemn you.

Friend, this Judge is your Savior—the same Savior who comes to you every Sunday,  
blotting out all your transgressions, remembering your sins no more.

In fact, this very morning, He bids you come to His altar...

to give you His body nailed to the cross,

His blood poured out from His wounds,

saying, "for the forgiveness of all of your sins..."

And on that Day, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you  
from the foundation of the world."

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

**Standing...**And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.