

SECOND TO LAST SUNDAY

November 14 2021 • 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.

Advent gives us the time we need to prepare for Christmas—the birth of our Lord.
Lent gives us the time we need to prepare for Easter—the resurrection of our Lord.

These Last Three Sundays of the Church Year do the same.

They give us the time to marvel, to meditate and prepare
for the return of our Lord.

Let us pray. Eternal God, Merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to await for the Day of His return with eyes fixed on the Kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever,
Amen.

Sitting...

When God begins His work of Creation, He first creates the space,
then...He goes back to fill it.
Days 1, 2 and 3 He creates the heavens, the waters and the land,
with Days 4, 5 and 6 going back to those same spaces and filling each one.

When He creates those spaces, before filling them we read of Him making a separation—separating the light from the darkness (1.4),
separating waters from the waters (1.6),
and then separating the expanse from the waters (1.7).
The point is, at creation God separates.

Separating is exactly what Jesus will do when He comes again in glory,
when He comes with His holy angels who appear with Him on that Day.
I know at times it seems that this Day will never come to pass,
with most Christians even, somewhat ho-hum about it...
But this will happen beloved—the Lord promises it.

And when it does,

Jesus will not come lowly as He did in His first advent.

Nor will He come in humiliation or veiled in poverty.

Nor will He come to be falsely accused,

to suffer and die.

His return brings about the resurrection of all flesh,

where souls are reunited with bodies,

and He is received by all as King and Lord.

He returns to judge,

making a final and eternal separation.

This separation, of course, 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.

Making it undeniably, unquestionably, your future—

And not only yours,

but everyone who has ever experienced human birth,

from Adam and Eve on down the line.

The visible flock that we've known all of our lives, namely, the Church,

although it may appear to be one, isn't one at all.

What appears to be one flock now is comprised of sheep and goats.

They are different, although from the outside they appear the same.

This is why the visible church knows no real unity.

For there are divisions, factions and a multiplicity of denominations.

There are worship wars, battles for the Bible,

sectarian Bible translations, and congregational divisions.

There are competing seminaries,

district and synodical dissension,

strife and contention,

false doctrine and outward practice that expresses it...

just to name a few!

These are all signs that the flock is not yet pure,
evidence that the sheep and goats are still mixed.

But on the Last Day...

when the sheep are separated from the goats,
when the unbelievers will be sundered from the believers,
the dross will finally be removed
and the Church will be purified.

The condemned will be gathered on His left,
to whom He will speak those horrible words,
*"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire
prepared for the devil and his angels."*

But why? Why do they get separated out? Because of the absence of saving faith.
During the earthly life of the goats, God said through the lips of His pastors,
"Believe on Jesus," and the goats said, "I'd rather not."

He said through the lips of His pastors,
"Be Christ's child" and the goats said, "I'm good."

He said through the lips of His pastors,
"Take and eat" and the goats 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 the goats said, "Hey, kids, let's go have some fun instead."

And He said through the lips of His pastors,
"There is coming a Day of judgment"
and the goats said, "I'll take my chances."

Oh sure, the goats may have donated blood in their earthy life,
given money to the Humane Society,
adopted a dog from the animal shelter,
picked up trash in the ocean and
volunteered at a 5K run against Breast Cancer,
but these works never emanated from faith...
The "good works" of the goats
are praised by others and tallied by themselves
but never flowed from a life of faith.

Beloved, we cannot see faith in others.

But God can.

Because He's the One who gave it and gives it still.

So, when the glorious returning Christ makes this separation, the goats will protest.

They will proudly stand by their works—

thinking they've done all that's necessary to get into heaven.

But fallen man does not have the capacity to do what is necessary.

The final judgment is not a negotiation.

There is no appeal.

In rejecting Christ's gospel of mercy

and with no faith to be found in them—***that's the key,***

all they can do is be judged by the strictness of the Law.

They will be separated.

Judged.

And cast into an awful place

that was never prepared for them.

But there is another side, a side of safety, a side of deliverance, a side of joy and bliss.

Then the King will say to those on his right,

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father,

inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Get that! The kingdom is prepared for the sheep—prepared for you,
prior to the laying down of the world.

So, before there was the Fall, a redemption,

before any works were ever done,

before it all, a kingdom of sheer grace

was prepared, ready and waiting

for the sheep.

This by the way, echoes exactly what St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus. He wrote,

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in*

Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in

him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless

before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus

Christ,

What's Paul saying? That faith lives to please God, because faith knows that your salvation is already accomplished, and freely made yours, through Christ.

Upon hearing this, the Lord who died for you and rose for you, will then bless the sheep.
 He will speak of your righteous acts—all your acts of love and mercy,
 shown to your neighbor—acts like,
 feeding the hungry,
 giving drink to the thirsty,
 welcoming the stranger,
 clothing the naked,
 visiting the sick and imprisoned—
 He identifies those fruits—
 those good works
 which did emanate from faith.
 Again, faith to us is invisible.
 But not to Him.

And speaking of faith,
 all these actions describe what Jesus Himself did for you.
 For you see, in your hunger, He feeds you His Body.
 In your thirst, He gives you His Blood to drink.
 As you are a stranger and pilgrim here,
 He opens His House and His Kingdom to you.
 He clothes you with His righteousness,
 heals your sickness and visits you
 by placing His Spirit in you,
 and He frees you from the prison of
 transgression by the full remission
 of your sins.
 What a lovely picture of Christ.

On this the Scriptures are clear:
 No one is made a sheep by their works.
 It is faith that saves—faith that makes one a true Christian.
 And while we are saved by faith alone,
 that faith is never alone.
 Faith has fruits, visible fruits, fruits seen by men,
 fruits known by God.

Beloved, your faith is living and it bears fruit—with many times you not even knowing.
 Because where faith is, where God's Spirit is, good works flow automatically.
 Faith does not count up good works.
 All faith does is give all glory to God.

And speaking of faith, faith longs for this day.

Daniel saw it.

The Lord Jesus promised it.

John saw it too.

And this day is yours to ponder,

yours to earnestly hope for,

as the Words of the prophet

and the apostle

and the Lord Himself

teach you of His coming in glory,

to purify his Church—

and receive You.

To which we say, Come soon, Lord 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.