

19 November 2006
Second-Last Sunday in the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Hanging Judge”

Text: Daniel 7:9-10; Hebrews 12:1-2; Mark 13:24-31

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

***As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued and came out from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*** (Daniel 7)

That is a courtroom scene that most of us (quite frankly) are not familiar with. A scene of awe and terror and justice. Standing before the One whose Word does what it says. Always. Standing before the One who is so completely other than us, and to whom we are accountable. Accountable for how you have lived this life. For how you have treated others. For whether or not you have feared, loved, and trusted this One more than all else. For your stewardship of all that God has entrusted to you – your possessions and income, your family and friends, your talents and abilities, His Word and faith. What have you done? What will you say? What will you say to this Judge who is the Ancient of Days, knowing all things? This Judge whose clothing is as white as snow, with no injustice or stain? This Judge who is a consuming fire?

This is a Judge that most of us (quite frankly) are not familiar with. No, we are more familiar with judges like Judge Judy, Judge Mathis, or Judge Joe Brown, just to name a few from the TV Guide. “Entertainment judges” you could call them, who even when they try to be serious and stern are more jokes than justice. Or if you are not familiar with these judges, then it is the judges we know from the TV dramas – judges easily manipulated by slick lawyers; judges who really just read the verdict of the jury.

But in Daniel’s courtroom there is no jury. There is no entertaining. There is no manipulating. There is an objective judge who on the basis of objective evidence of the transgression of objective laws will pronounce an objective judgment. And the message

at the end of the Church Year is: **its time to take that seriously.** For when you are measured against this Judge's objective Law, what is that verdict going to be for you? That answer, dear fellow sinners, is not a tough one to figure out.

Now, we shouldn't be surprised if the world doesn't take this Judge seriously. Just as our view of earthly fathers colors our view of our Heavenly Father, it's probably safe to say that our view of earthly judges colors our view of the heavenly judge. And so in our TV nation and world, we shouldn't be surprised if the world doesn't take this Judge or this Judgment seriously. . . . But we *should* be surprised – and *dismayed!* – when the Church refuses to. When sin is downplayed and de-emphasized. When Law and Gospel is sacrificed for sermons of self-affirmation or how to live a better life. When God is portrayed simply as a Mr. Nice Guy, who winks our at sins and indiscretions. When we hear that the problem with the Church is its portrayal of God as too stern and unyielding, and that we need to lighten up!

For actually, quite the opposite is true. Our problem today isn't of a God **too stern**, but a God **too soft!** A God who is by many today portrayed as One who can be appeased and whose wrath can be averted by what we do, by our good works, by our devotion and dedication. A God who can, in short, be bought off. How many today think that? How many today are counting on a jury of our peers to vouch for us? How many think our sin not so bad? Not so much that we can't make up for it?

But sin, Scripture tells us, is a capital offense. An offense against God. And the wages of sin is death. For its not just that sin has caused a rift, a division between creature and Creator – it has . . . but it is far worse than that. Sin is an offense against God because it is claiming that our good and gracious God is not good and gracious at all; it is accusing the all-knowing God of not knowing what is best for me; it is making idols of my will, my wants, my feelings, my desires, my wisdom, and saying: “*God, this throne's not big enough for the two of us; one of us has got to go.*” And we all know who gets pushed off then . . .

Do we think God doesn't mind that so much? Do we think we can throw Him a few bones of good behaviour and He'll just forget about the whole thing? When we come before that throne, that awesome Judge, what do we think the verdict will be? . . . Perhaps, then, if our view of earthly judges colors our view of the heavenly judge, we should see God not so much as a not-so-serious “entertainment judge,” but as the old, no-nonsense “hanging judge.”

Should you fear such a God? Should you fear this hanging judge? Well, yes . . . *and no!* Because the Scriptures do not only reveal to us the **perfect justice** of this hanging judge,

but also the **mercy** of this hanging judge, who in mercy *is the judge hanging on the cross*. The Judge who does not overlook our sin, wink at us, accept our excuses, or slap us on the behind a few times – but who took our capital punishment upon Himself, that in that sacrificial act, in that atonement, all necessary justice and judgment would be done. That we need never worry about it again – that God might change His mind, or that there might be something left undone that might come back to haunt us. *No!* For when the Son of God, our Saviour Jesus Christ, uttered those final words from the cross: **“It is finished”** – it was! All was finished. **Jesus was the Victor** – on the cross overthrowing and finishing the reign and rule and power of Satan over us. **And Jesus was the Redeemer** – on the cross taking our judgment in our stead, that His blood wash away and finish our sins and reconcile us to the Father. That when ***the books are opened***, there be nothing left against us. Nothing to condemn us; nothing to convict us; nothing to count against us. That our accuser be silenced (Rev 12:10), and our Saviour confess and acknowledge us before the Judge (Mt 10:32; Rev 3:5).

And so in Christ, the “hanging judge” hangs no more! And He hangs no more because He is *risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity!* And He lives and reigns **for you**. Not sitting idly in Heaven, but praying for you, forgiving you, and strengthening you. Not sitting idly in Heaven, but protecting you from the allures and temptations of Satan, and from the false gods and idols of this world. Not sitting idly in Heaven, but working in your life, to fix your eyes on Him, on His cross, on His life. For He is not only the Author, but the Perfecter of your faith. (Heb 12) The One who claimed you and will keep you. The One who would not have you run *from* Him, but *to* Him, where He has promised to be for you – in His Word, His Absolution, His Supper – knowing that He is here for you not in judgment, but with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Not counting your sins against you (2 Cor 5:19) but regarding us as the sons and daughters He has made us in Holy Baptism. And rejoicing in us! Yes, for He wants to be with us, and wants us with Him. Not only in eternity, but also here and now.

And when we know such a God – as Father, as Saviour, as *merciful* Judge – *then* the cross becomes for us *one more thing*. Not just our victory and our redemption, but also our **example**. That we see that here is how sons of God use their freedom – to lay down their lives for others. *Not because we have to, but because we can!* For set free from the tyranny of Satan, and set free from the guilt and condemnation of our sin, and set free from our fear in the assurance of our verdict of *not guilty* before the Judge in the end through the forgiveness of our sins, and given the promise of eternal life . . . **how do we then live that life now?** In confidence, yes. In joy, yes. But also in service to our neighbor, and in prayer for all. ***Laying aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely,*** (Heb 12) and fixing our eyes on Jesus, who has done such great things for us. Who has set us completely and absolutely free, that as we have freely received, so we may

freely give. (Mt 10:8 KJV)

And perhaps most importantly, speaking the truth in love. To all people. That they may know their sin and its seriousness; but that they may know *even more* their Saviour, who hung for them on the cross, and the greatness of His love and forgiveness. That there is no other way to salvation. No other way to stand before the judgment seat and live. That when our Lord *does* return, on that last day, and ***the sun is darkened and the moon stops giving its light*** (Mark 13:24) – that it be not a *frightening* darkening, but a *glorious* darkening! A glorious darkening as the light of the glory of Christ overwhelms the lights of this world and makes them look dark! (Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*) And we see then with our eyes what we see now only by faith – the glory of His perfection, the glory of His righteousness, the glory of His holiness. *And we will not be afraid*. For while we all must stand before the judgment seat of this glorious One (2 Cor 5:10), this One coming in glory is not only our Judge, but our Father, our brother, our Saviour. Our “hanging judge” who hung for us. Our risen Lord who rose for us. Our living Lord who lives for us. And He is coming to take us home.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

(Some of the thoughts in this sermon from *Here Comes the Judge* by Korey Maas in *Modern Reformation*, Vol 15 No 3, May/June 2006, p. 4-8)