

Jesu Juva

“Worth Waiting For”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13; Amos 5:18-24

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

There has always been a certain fascination with knowing how and when the world is going to end. Those who hold to a naturalistic view of things, that the world happened by chance, usually think it's going to end by chance as well - the sun is going to blow up and incinerate the earth, or it's going to go out and freeze the earth; or a meteor is going to smash into the earth; or some other cosmic event is going to wipe out life on this earth as we know it. Some think man is going to be responsible - either killing ourselves with global warming, through a nuclear holocaust, a because of some genetically-engineered disease that we've produced but cannot control. And then there are those who most folks would consider “on the fringes” (Is that a nice way to say it?) who think it's going to come because of aliens or something like that. Any way you slice it, it's frightening stuff. And so most people don't even want to think about it at all.

But how should we - the Church, Christians - think of the end? Well, Scripturally, of course. And the End of the Church's Year, today and the next two weeks, gives us a chance to do that. Very generally, the first half of the Church's Year focuses on the life of Jesus and the second half on the life of the Church, and at the end we focus on the end. And we believe that the God who began this world purposefully will end it in the same way. But an end that is really not an end at all, but a new beginning. A new heavens and a new earth for a new you. That just as you and all believers in Christ will be raised from the dead not with your same old, sinful flesh but with your same bodies glorified and purified from the sin that right now so burdens us, so, in a sense, will all of creation. A new heavens and a new earth for a new you. And if you want to know more than that and know exactly what that means and what that will be like, you'll have to stayed tuned and experience it yourself. We're just not given much more information than that.

But this we know: it's going to happen not by chance or by accident - but purposefully, when Jesus comes again. God is in control.

But still - what should be our attitude toward that day? Should we just not think about it? Should we be afraid of it? The Bible speaks of the final judgment that will come with that day, so should we fear that? Your life, on trial! All those mistakes, all those regrets, all those purposeful sins and shameful things you've done and thought and desired! Those things that up until that day you've been able to keep secret but then will be exposed and judged? Judging by my life that would be a reason to fear that day! And, in fact, we'll consider all that in a couple of weeks with the readings a couple of Sundays from now -

that's your teaser! But here's a preview, to calm your fears: would not a God who comforts and cares for His children *now* do so also at the end, on the last day, as well? Would He help us now but make us fend for ourselves then? No. You have a Saviour. You need not fear.

But what, then, of the words, for example, that we heard from the prophet Amos today? Words that seem to indicate that we should fear that day. For in the words of Amos we heard that ***it will be a day of darkness, not light; as if a man fled a lion and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.*** That sounds pretty frightening to me!

And it would be, were it not for Jesus. You see, Amos was speaking to an Israel who decided to go their own way. Who decided they wanted a different god or gods but at the same time wanted to hedge their bets - so they kept the Temple and continued to do all the rituals there, but their hearts and delight and trust and worship were really with others gods, false gods. And that's why God told them through Amos: *I hate your feasts, your assemblies, your music, and your offerings. You're just going through the motions. I know you don't mean it. I know where your heart is, that it's not with Me.* And so He sent Amos to warn them. And then He put it in His Word to warn us. That if you come here on Sunday and just faithlessly and thoughtlessly go through the motions and then leave this place and live as if this God and these gifts didn't even exist . . . well then maybe you should fear that last day. You're no different than the Old Testament Israel of Amos' day.

Now if those words just pricked your conscience and churned your gut - and they should have for who of us is not guilty of that? - then *good!* They've done their job. Repent, and then know this too: that darkness, those beasts, and that serpent - *your* darkness, *your* beasts, and *your* serpent - were given to Jesus in your place. That's what happened to Him on the cross. He went through your judgment for you. That's why He sweat drops like blood, that's why He prayed in agony, that's why He cried out of forsakenness from the cross - when all of our awful Last Days descended on Him in our place, that you be spared. You can still have it if you want it, but Jesus came and lived and died to take it for you. That you here instead, in faith, receive His forgiveness and life, and then leave this place and live as the child of God you are. Because here - to use the words of Amos again - ***the justice and righteousness*** that God seeks has, in fact, ***rolled down like waters and an ever-flowing stream*** from the side of Jesus on the cross. He provided it for you. To wash you clean in the water of Baptism and the Blood of His Supper. To give you the forgiveness and confidence you need to live a new life, not the same old life. A selfless life, not a selfish life. A joyful life, not a spiteful life. A confident life, not a fearful life.

Which then means that we can view the Last Day, that day when Jesus comes again a bit differently - *like what we heard in the Holy Gospel*. Like the joy of a wedding day. That when the Last Day comes, it will not be a day of fear and dread (since Jesus dealt with that already), but of celebration. The day awaited so long, finally come.

But there's a danger here too: the danger that we grow tired of waiting, or bored of waiting, and so be unprepared when Jesus comes. 'Cuz we come to church every week, and it's the same old thing every week, and we have plenty of time . . . So it's really kind of foolish, don't you think, to worry about what's going to happen *who knows when*, when I've got lots of practical stuff to worry about! Life to worry about, job to worry about, school to worry about, family to worry about, bills and problems to worry about. And the joy of the wedding fades - like in Amos' day - as hearts once filled with the bright light of faith grow cold and go out . . . That wasn't the intention, they didn't think that was going to happen, **Lord, Lord**, I really didn't mean for it to be this way . . . I guess it was the five maidens who *looked* so foolish lugging around their gas cans the whole time who were the wise ones in the end.

For isn't foolish-looking how it is? Think about it: how foolish does it look for a bridesmaid, all dressed up, hair and make-up done perfectly, nails carefully manicured, perfume on - to have flowers in one hand and a dirty, smelly can of gas in the other? Wouldn't we call them stupid, crazy, obsessed, fanatical girls? . . . Yet isn't that how Christians look to those outside the Church? To a world that thinks: *we don't need all that religion stuff. We've dressed ourselves up good*. How foolish we look lugging around the baggage of God's Word and truth. How foolish to come to church every Sunday; how foolish to waste our time in prayer; how foolish to call innocent little babies sinners and have them baptized; how foolish to think this Supper we call the Lord's, with its little morsel of bread and sip of wine, can really do anything; how foolish to trust in a God you cannot see; how foolish to confess your sins. *Relax*, the world says. Don't worry about all that baggage. Its not so important. *You'll be fine*. But things will look quite different in the end.

So these words of Jesus today help us keep things in perspective, and that what the world thinks is foolish *just might be the way of wisdom*. For when it comes to the things of God, we cannot count on ourselves and what makes sense to us - we need the guidance of the Word, the forgiveness of our Saviour, and the faith that only He can give.

Or maybe think of it like this: it's like when you buy something at the store and it's in one of those packages that seems like it's been sealed tight enough to survive a nuclear blast. But you can't wait to get it out and so begin cutting and hacking and stabbing at the package and you cut yourself and it's a mess and you still don't have the darn thing out! And then in your frustration you look at it see this fine print where it says: *open other end*. And then how foolish do you feel?

Well are we striving so hard for life that we don't realize we're at the wrong end? That life comes through death. The death and resurrection of Jesus. And that it is only by dying with Him that we live. *Sounds foolish, right?* But it's really the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God which says that the best way to wait for Jesus' **second** coming is to

keep our eyes fixed on His **first** coming. To see in His death and resurrection our own. That His death and resurrection is **the door** through which we enter that wedding feast that has no end.

So do that, you wise but foolish-looking Christians. And think of this Church and what happens here **as your own open and empty tomb**. That here at this font Jesus slew your old man and raised a new man, and that when you repent He does it again with His absolution. And that here at this altar, the slain but risen Body and Blood of Jesus is given to you as a pledge - that just as this Body and Blood that you eat was laid in the tomb and then raised back to life, so will your body and blood be. And through these things, these means, you see and yet do not see. You wait and yet receive what you are waiting for. Until that wonderful day when your waiting will end and your eyes will see. And you will be ready. For the feast.

Which is really another thing quite different from the world, this feast. For most marriages in this life begin with a honeymoon, which lasts only a short time, and then comes the everyday: the struggle, the sin, the forgiveness. And finally, the day when “till death parts us” comes true. . . . But imagine a marriage where the honeymoon comes at the end, and lasts forever. A marriage where not even death can separate what God has joined together. *That's the way of it with Jesus*. And that's something worth waiting for, even if it takes a little longer than we want or expect.

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