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“Comfort for the Last Day”

Text: Daniel 7; John 18:33-37; Revelation 1:4b-8

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

We heard from Daniel today: *As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat . . . The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

The spectre of a Judgment Day is a frightening one for most people. Having to stand before the Almighty and give an account. Having to answer for all that you did. Even things that didn't seem like such a big deal to you. Things that you don't even remember, but that were written down in your book.

When I was young (and some of you who are older may remember this, too), in school, if you did something wrong, we used to say “that was going in your permanent record.” Some file somewhere that would follow you around and effect your future. That was supposed to frighten us into good behavior.

Today, though, it's worse than that. Today, it's not just school kids that have to worry about that, and about some mythical “permanent record.” Today, it's the internet and social media and archives of things from the past. Everyone from politicians to celebrities to folks that just aren't liked have all kinds of things from their past dredged up to confront them and judge them. Something that may have been acceptable then but is not now. Something then written or said in jest but now considered hate speech. People are accused and atonement for their “sin” is demanded.

That's what we see happening in our world today, and people's lives and careers are being ruined. So the thought of a Judgment Day, when *everything* is out there; *everything* from your past . . . And not just what you did or wrote, but with God, even your thoughts and desires! Yeah, that's frightening.

But these verses from Daniel we heard today weren't meant to frighten us, but to comfort us! So what I want to do is read this entire chapter of Daniel to you so you can hear that. You'll hear that Daniel was anxious and alarmed. There are beasts and destruction and trouble in this vision - alarming things! God's people, God's saints, warred against and overcome. But in the end, it is the Most High that prevails, and the saints are saved. And so Daniel is told, so that we will be told, not so that we will be frightened of a judgment,

but rather so that as bad as things look, as bad as things might get, we know the end, how it will all turn out. So listen . . . and listen for when the court appears *a second time*, and what happens then . . .

[Read Daniel chapter 7]

*Did you hear it?* Some folks don't because they get all caught up in the details, trying to identify the beasts and the horns and the times and such. But focus on the big picture that Daniel was describing. That in the end, this judgment was not *of* the saints but *for* the saints! That in the end, it is the evil that is judged and cast away, and the ones who look defeated and cast out - God's saints - are victorious in the end. It is the Most High, who (to use the words we heard from Revelation today) ***who is and who was and who is to come***, who is ruling all things, which - whether or not we see that reality now - we will see in the end.

And we will see it in the end because **what will happen in the end has, in fact, already happened**. It happened when all the terrifying powers and evil in the world rose up against Jesus, and with His death on the cross, looked like they prevailed against Him. Or think of it this way: **the cross is when all the judgment of the Last Day happened at one moment in time**. And in Jesus, all the Church, all the saints, even God Himself, seemed overcome, dead, and buried. It seemed that sin and evil won. That was the hour, as Jesus said, of the power of darkness.

But all the power of the world did not win. It *couldn't*. Pilate's power, Caesar's power, worldly power, has its time, but in the end, the truth will win. Power then and power now scoffs at the truth, ridicules the truth, belittles the truth, and makes truth what they want it to be. But when *the court shall sit in judgment, his dominion, his power, worldly power, the power of evil, shall be taken away*, and the truth will be known, be seen, and shall prevail. Because Jesus prevailed. He rose from the dead. Jesus, who is *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6).

So just as in Daniel's vision the horrors of the beasts is replaced with the joy of God's judgment for the saints, so, too, the horror of the cross is replaced with the joy of the resurrection, and so, too, will the horror of the evil in our world be replaced with the joy of our victory of Jesus. And that is a joy and confidence we have, in fact, already now. For just as **the cross is when all the judgment of the Last Day happened at one moment in time**, so **the Word and Sacraments are when all the victory of the Last Day is given to us here and now, in this moment in time**. The victory over sin you need given here in the forgiveness of your sins. The victory over death you need given here as you are raised from being dead in your trespasses and sins and given new life.

Which is to say that Daniel's vision was fulfilled (1.) first **on the cross** in Jesus' death and resurrection, when He took our judgment upon Himself; (2.) and it is fulfilled

secondly **here** where we are joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection and given His victory; (3.) and it is fulfilled **finally and fully** on the Last Day when we are raised and given the kingdom won for us by Jesus. So when the Last Day comes, we have nothing to fear. Because, in fact, you've been living it all along. And so it will be a day of great joy for you and me and all the saints. All who are in Christ Jesus by faith.

Which is why John begins his account in the book of Revelation - which also has a lots of beasts and frightening images - with these words that we heard today: ***grace to you and peace***. We have peace - not anxiety, not fear of the Last Day, not dread, but peace, because we have received the ***grace*** of God - the forgiveness of our sins. Our sins for which we rightly deserve judgment and condemnation, but which have been taken away by Him, who - as John put it in the verses from Revelation today - ***who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.***

That's who you are, dear children of God, for that's who Jesus has made you. You are dearly loved, you have been set free, and you belong to the King. The King who created you, the King who stood before Pilate and hung on the cross for you, and the King who is coming again for you. Because He wants you to be with Him, as Daniel said, *forever, forever and ever.*

We live now with that confidence. The world may dredge up your past sins and demand you atone for them, but your sins have already been atoned for by Jesus on the cross. And evil may rise up against you as children of God, but the power of evil is no match for the love of the Most High. And death will come for you, sooner or later, in one way or another, but you've already conquered death, in Jesus. So it can't have you either. The court has already sat, the judgment has already been given, the victory already won. Jesus did it all. **The Last Day will simply show us and make visible for all to see what we already know and live now by faith.**

So we live now with that confidence. Made new, we live new lives. Forgiven, we forgive those who sin against us. Knowing the truth, we speak the truth. And when we die, we live. Because that's Jesus, and it's you who live in Jesus. For you've been baptized into Him, absolved by Him, and fed by Him. You live in Him who lives in you.

So when that Last Day comes, Daniel wants you to know, God will judge *for you*. When that Last Day comes, it will not be for you a day of anxiety, fear, or dread, but a day of fulfillment. The fulfillment of **the joy** and peace you've been living all along, of **the kingdom** you've been living in all along, and **the love** you been living in all along. Hidden now, maybe. But visible then . . . ***and forever, forever and ever.***

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.