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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
Last Sunday of Church Year
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“The Public Judgment”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 25,

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right, and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father, receive the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.....and then He will say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

It happened 30 years ago. The San Francisco Giants were hosting the Oakland A’s in Game 3 of the World Series. The Giants were behind 2 games to none. Al Michaels of ABC Sports had just gone on the air. The game was about to begin, and Michaels was doing his masterful job of setting the scene, describing the current morale of each team, recapping the last two games. Then, in a moment, everything changed.

Five minutes into the broadcast, a powerful earthquake struck the area. Suddenly, to the tens of thousands of fans in Candlestick Park, the World Series didn’t matter. The starting pitchers did not matter. Baseball did not matter. Suddenly, a new reality had arrived. And when it did, things that seemed so important less than a minute earlier were not important at all. And it had all happened so suddenly. It all happened without warning.

There's one event left in salvation history of this world for Christ to accomplish. Everything else is done. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. DONE. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. DONE. Born of the Virgin Mary. DONE. Lived perfectly for us. DONE. Suffered under Pontius Pilate. DONE. Was crucified. DONE. Died. DONE. Buried. DONE. He descended into Hell. DONE. On the third day He rose again from the dead. DONE. He ascended into heaven. DONE. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. DONE. There's only one event left to happen in salvation history. *"And He will come again with Glory, to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end."*

Now, in case you're anxious about that day, it may be that the devil is scaring you into believing that you don't know what verdict God will render on that day – which is a lie – we already know the verdict: *"Not guilty in Christ."* Romans 8, ***"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** However, those who are not in Jesus should be worried. Their verdict will be: *"Guilty apart from Christ"*. But if you're facing End Times anxiety, God's Word says that the Last Day will be a Day of Resurrection and Life. 1st Thessalonians 4, ***"The dead in Christ will be raised first and we who are still alive (referring to Christians) will be caught up to meet our Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."***

Now what may surprise you is that everyone rises on the last day - the good, the bad, and the ugly. Paul says, *'As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.'* Jesus says in John 5, ***"A time is coming when ALL who are in their graves will hear His voice, and they will come out of their graves. Those who have done good (as evidence of their faith) will rise to live; and those who have done evil (as evidence of their unbelief) will rise to be condemned."*** What a surprise it will be to those who thought that Jesus stuff was all a bunch of fairy tales. On the Last Day everyone gets to 'see' the victory over death Jesus won for them by His resurrection, as their own dead bodies come back to life. But for the unbelievers they will rise to be condemned. That day will reveal the truth that Jesus really was, as John 1:29 says, ***"The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."*** Jesus' death is all-inclusive. It's not that Jesus redeemed the sheep, but not the goats. He redeemed everyone. Jesus doesn't discriminate with His love. Both the sheep and goats are died for. Everyone is included in Jesus death, before anyone is excluded by their own refusal to trust in His forgiving death. The only reason the goats don't end up at the party, is that they refuse their place at the party on God's terms, which is always repentance of our sins, and faith in Jesus' payment for those sins. **Page 2**

And then comes the Public Judgment, and the second surprise of the day. You'd expect the judgment to be about our works - whenever anyone talks about Judgment Day, we always say things like: "He'll get what's coming to him in the end." "He'll have to answer for that on the last day." Or "Bob's in heaven because He was such a good man." Many believe Jesus is going to judge on the basis of what we've done or haven't done, but that's not the case at all.

Here we need to listen to the parable of the sheep and goats very carefully. First, there is a sorting, or a separation: Sheep to the right. Goats to the left. During the dark days of this sinful world, the sheep and goats grazed together as one flock. They grew up together, played sports together, sat side by side in the same restaurants. And it is true that both the sheep and the goats have the same forgiving Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

But at the end of the day, as the sun is setting, the Shepherd, sorts the sheep and goats into their respective pens. Sheep to the forgiven right. Goats to the condemned left. It's not the works they did or didn't do that's the basis of the judgment but 'who' they are. Those who are Goats go to the dishonorable left not because of what they did, but because they are unbelieving goats. Sheep go to the honorable right, not because of what they did, but because they are trusting sheep. What they did or didn't do merely reflects 'who' they already were. Their works don't determine their identity, their works display their identity. It's their identity that determines where they go eternally.

A 3rd surprise is in verse 37. Jesus gives us a clue of what determines whether one is a sheep or a goat. In verse 37 the sheep are called the 'righteous'. But wait a second. Jesus says in Romans 3, ***By the works of the Law no one will be declared righteous.*** So how is it that the sheep are called 'righteous'? They have been 'declared righteous' by God's grace, on account of Christ's shed blood, through faith. Romans 3, ***But now a righteousness from God has been made known. This righteousness from God, comes through faith in Jesus to all who believe.***

The basis for determining the verdict 'guilty' or 'not guilty'; 'sheep' or 'goat' is what one did with Jesus, and His forgiving blood. Did we receive Jesus and His forgiveness or reject Him? Did we believe He saved us or blow Him off? We hear the basis for the judgment in John 3:36 which says, ***Whoever believes in the Son already has eternal life; but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*** Again, John 3:17-18 says, ***For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is NOT condemned, but whoever does not believe in Him is condemned already.*** Page 3

The sole criterion of whether one goes to heaven or hell is whether or not one trusted in Jesus, and His shed blood, for their forgiveness. “.....***whoever believes already has eternal life....whoever does not believe is condemned already.....***”. And it is on that basis that we face God’s Private Judgment, individually, on the day we die. What happens on Judgment Day, when Jesus comes again, is what we might call the “Public Judgment”. It simply “makes Public”, those who trusted in Jesus, who now, publicly, in both their raised body and soul, “***receive the kingdom prepared for them from the creation of the world,***” while those who did not trust in Jesus – the goats - who said to Christ, ‘*get out of my life, and take Your forgiveness with you,*’ on Judgment day Jesus will Publicly give them what they wanted - life without Him, but, or course, that’s hell

Now comes the 4th surprise. When Jesus finally mentions our works, notice: He only sees the good works of His sheep. Why? All of the sheep’s sins have been forgiven by Jesus’ blood, through faith, and forgotten. However, notice that Jesus only sees the bad works for the goats. Why? God’s Word teaches: “***without faith it is impossible to please God.***” It’s true that Jesus praises the works of the sheep, and condemns the lack of works of the goats in Matthew 25. So how are we to understand that? Those who have already been declared ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’ on the day they died, will not have their verdict changed on Judgment Day. They will simply be Publicly Identified as a ‘sheep’ or a ‘goat’ by the fruits of their faith or unbelief. On that day Jesus will say, for all the angels and all the world, to see, “***These are my sheep. They trusted in Me as their Savior, and look how they loved me with their lives.***” And He will also say, for all to see, ‘***These are not my sheep, but are the goats, for they did not believe in Me as their Savior; and look how they showed their unbelief with their lives.***”

But, for those of you who may have a little bit of End Times anxiety, you need not worry. Just hold God to His Word. Romans 8, “***There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***” 1st John 5, “***Whoever has the Son of God has life, but the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.***” Jesus is the dividing line of all of history, all of humanity, and of heaven and hell. Jesus said in John 5, “***Whoever believes in the Son already has eternal life, and will not be condemned. He has already crossed over from death to life.***” But what if God changes His mind on Judgment Day? He won’t. He can’t. Malachi 3, “***I, the Lord, do not change.***” He means it when He promises us in John 11, “***I am the resurrection and the life. whoever believes in Me, will live, even if he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die eternally.***” You’ve got His word on it. Hebrews 6 says, “***It is impossible for God to lie.***” Romans 11 says, “***His call is irrevocable’.*** **Page 4**

Now if you're not interested that Jesus has already reconciled you to the Father by His forgiving death, or if you don't want the deal God gave you in 1st John 1:9, "***The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all unrighteousness,***" then you should be scared to death of what Judgment Day will bring you. Maybe you say, 'well, I'm not scared.' Well, you should be. But if you are in Christ, if you know and trust that sweetest of deals which the Lord gave you, *'There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains,'* then you can look forward to that day, more than anything else you've ever looked forward to. It will be the greatest day of your life because on that day, Hebrews 9:28 promises, "***And He is coming again to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.***" It will be your wedding day. It will be the day that you are made new and perfect and unable to suffer and die ever again. It will be the day when the enemies of sin, death, and the devil, will be thrown into the lake of fire forever, never to attack us again. It will be your entrance into a Paradise that is greater than you ever dared to dream, where you and I will experience to the fullest, with all of our senses working perfectly, the joys in our Savior's kingdom which have no end.

Yes, Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. We call it judgment day or the Public Judgment. But those who take God at His promise in Colossians 1, "***He has reconciled all things to Himself by making peace through Christ's blood shed on the cross.***", you don't need to be afraid of that day. In fact, you can look forward to it, because you know personally the One who is coming as the Judge. The One who is coming to Publicly judge you 'guilty' or 'not guilty' is the One Who already came as Savior, and already judged you 'not guilty'. He let His Father judge Him guilty for you. Isaiah 53, "***The Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all.***" At that moment your sins weren't your sins anymore. Jesus took them and said *'They're my sins now, and your punishment is my punishment now.'* And God, the Father, then said to His own Son, Jesus, "***Depart from Me, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and His angels.***" And Jesus literally went to hell for us: "***My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?***" And only after He suffered all of hell for all of us, He said, "***It is finished.***" And God, the Father's verdict is: "***by His stripes we are healed.***" God can no more judge you of sin, now that you are forgiven, then He can judge His own Son, Jesus with sin, and He has none. And He won't go back on His forgiveness or retract the cross. The only thing He will do on that day is to say to everyone gathered before His throne, to all peoples and angels, "*These are my sheep, they trusted in Me as their Savior, and I forgave and saved them. And look how they loved me with their lives. And these are the goats. They didn't believe in Me. They loved their sins instead of Me, and look how they showed their unbelief with their lives.*" **Page 5**

On that day He will say to the goats, “*Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels, and they will go away to eternal punishment.*” And then He will say to His sheep, “*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, receive your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world... and the righteous will go away to everlasting life.*” The End. AMEN.