

Trinity 23  
 November 15, 2009  
 Prov. 8:11-22; **Phil. 3:17-21**; Mtt. 22:15-22

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*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.**

*The End.* These two little English words can be powerful. They inform us that the novel or movie that we were so involved in is finished. The story is done. There is no waiting to see what else might happen. And don't we like happy endings? You feel at peace knowing that Dorothy is back safe in Kansas and no longer stalked by the wicked witch.

But life has endings that don't always leave us with the same comfort as seeing Dorothy and Toto safe in their bed. There are real tornadoes in life that don't leave happy endings. Maybe, it is the end of a job or career, the end of the days when you could travel, play sports, or drive a car. Maybe, it's the sudden end of the life of a loved one. Maybe, it's a sudden end to your health and independence. Maybe, you are in a difficult marriage, have difficult children, or have difficulty paying the bills - and you feel like it is the end of the world. There are countless "the ends" in our lives that are less than happy.

And what about our lives themselves? As I watched *The Wizard of Oz* last week with my daughter, I couldn't help but think that a lot of the actors are probably dead. Have you had similar thoughts? Has the visit to the nursing home, the hospice center, hospital, or funeral home - reminded you of the reality that the Fat Lady will sing? We can feel this reality at work in our bodies. Our joints ache, our hearing goes and our bodies preach to us, "That's all folks." And it happens so fast. Where does the time go? Summer ends and a dark cold winter sets in.

Next week marks the end of the church year. This also reminds us that there is an end coming to the world. This world, where paying taxes to Caesar seems so permanent, is passing away. Your cares of this life - your bank account - healthcare and politics - the Royals and the Chiefs - won't matter in the end. The world is spinning quickly to its certain conclusion. Turn on the news and you can see that mankind isn't progressing toward some utopia. The tragedy at Fort Hood is just one example in a sad litany of others. There are wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and the like. We are living in the end times - the last days. Christ could return in a twinkling of an eye and it will be the end of the world and Judgment Day.

Why is there an end to our lives or an end to the world? Adam and Eve's fall into sin, marked the end to paradise and the beginning of a corrupt world full of sin, death, and tears. As their children, we too are responsible for the problem. Haven't we sinned? Can anyone one of us really say that at the end of the day or the end of our lives that we deserve anything from Holy God, but temporal and eternal punishment?

So, what puts an end to our problems? What can we do? Will diet and exercise put an end to our dying? Nope. Will clicking our heels together 3 times take us out our troubles? Not likely. Will trying really hard to please God put an end to His just wrath? The Jewish Christians in our epistle lesson thought so.

Many Jews who had converted to Christianity thought that you had to be circumcised to go to heaven. They thought that they could do something in their lives that would help them in the end. They thought it was observing circumcision or this that dietary law, in addition to

Christ, that pleased God. Sure, these Jews said that they believed that Jesus was their Savior – their Messiah, but they added something to the work of Jesus. They added circumcision. **For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.**

This “Jesus and something more” thinking is still around today. Many think Christianity and the Bible are about how to live in this perishing world. People want preaching that they find applicable to temporary problems that will give them steps to end their suffering. They say, “I ‘know’ about Jesus, just tell me what I can do to put an end to my earthly problems – my marriage, my obesity, my finances, or my children.” **For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.**

If you add something to the cross of Christ - or think that there is something more than the cross of Christ that will end your problems – you in reality put an end to its hope for you. If you think that it is faith plus works – there is a sad end of the story for you. If you think salvation is Jesus plus you trying really hard to keep the Law – your end, your *telos*, is destruction. If we think that we lack something in this life or the next when we have the cross of Christ – then when know where our minds are set.

The Word of God prepares us for the end – the end of our lives – and the end of the world and judgment day. The Bible is the story of Christ saving sinners. Sure, there is good advice in the Bible. The 10 Commandments tell us how to live. The Bible tells us if you want to have a good marriage, love God with your whole heart and love your spouse as yourself. Yet, Laws and steps have no hope to putting and end to our problems. The Law doesn’t give us the power to live – in fact – it kills us.

There is no end to trying to please God under the Law. Living under the Law, like the Jews in our text, ends in destruction. If you think it is what you do that please God, then you are not prepared for the end. If you think the Bible will give you steps to get rid of suffering in this life, think again. Thankfully, the Bible isn’t about steps for us to take, but about the steps that Jesus took for us.

The Cross of Christ is more than enough for us. Jesus’ sinless life, death, and resurrection have put an end to our real problems. The steps that we fail over and over to take, Jesus took perfectly in our place. The Law that accused us to no end has been silenced. Jesus fulfilled the Law for us and has put an end to its demands. The Devil can no longer point to the Law and say there is more work for us to do to earn heaven. Furthermore, Jesus died for the sin of the world on the cross. *Dying to live – The Power of Forgiveness*. The sin of us trying to please God with our effort - all of our sins in marriage, raising children, and the like- has been paid for. All of our sin that only earns us hell was placed on sinless Jesus until He cried, “The End.”

It is finished - the story is over and there is a joyous ending. Jesus, as our substitute, was accepted by the Father. Jesus was raised for our justification. Sin, death, and the power of the devil have been defeated. The outcome is already determined. This joyous ending is given to you in Baptism.

In your Baptism you have been united with Christ and receive citizenship in heaven. We are united in a death like His and also united with a resurrection like His. In Baptism we die and are raised to new life. In Baptism we are given a life without end by the forgiveness of sins. Oh sure, there is an end when our heart stops beating, but we will only sing, “ding-dong the wicked

old Adam is dead.” The new man, raised in Baptism never tastes death. **20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (ESV)**

On the Last Day – this same body that God created and redeemed, will rise and be restored to the way He intended. It will be the end of Paradise lost and the beginning of the world without end that we have already now by faith.

The Word of God focuses on preparation for the end. Heaven with Christ is the goal and the prize. Therefore, we know, not see, that all of the tornadoes that God sends our way in this short life aren't for our punishment, but keep us in the faith until our old Adam dies for good. **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**<sup>1</sup>

So, are you ready for the end? Well, you're Baptized into Jesus. That means you get what He gets – suffering and then glory – winter and then spring. You are a citizen of heaven. As a citizen, Christ feeds you His body and blood for the forgiveness of all of your sins to sustain you as you walk through this vale of tears.

You are ready because Jesus keeps you in the faith until the end by giving you His gifts of Word and Sacrament. Christ prepares us for the end - the end of life and the end of the world. Being connected to Christ often gives us a sure hope and a happy ending. The End. Amen.

*Let us pray:*

*Abide with us and with Your whole Church. Abide with us at the end of the day, at the end of our life, at the end of the world. Abide with us with Your grace and goodness, with Your holy Word and Sacrament, with Your strength and blessing. Abide with us when the night of affliction and temptation comes upon us, the night of fear and despair, the night when death draws near. Abide with us and with all the faithful, now and forever. Amen.*<sup>2</sup>

*May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rm. 8:18

<sup>2</sup> LSB, Compline, p. 257.