

EASTER Sunday

April 21, 2019

St. Luke 24:1-12: ***“God’s Regard For His Own”***

I. The Way Things Are.

II. God’s Regard For His Own.

III. The Promised Victory.

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

St. Luke 24:1-12

Dear Friends in Christ,

Though Christmas has months ago passed, I want you to hear these words of Martin Luther from one of his Christmas sermons. They are most appropriate for this Easter morning:

Not a soul notices, not a soul understands what God is doing in the stable. He leaves empty the palaces and stately homes, he leaves the masses to their eating and drinking and good cheer. Consequently, the comfort and treasure in Christ remain hidden from the likes of such people. O! what a thick, black darkness hung over Bethlehem that night, when she failed to apprehend so great a light within her walls! How decisively God shows that he has no regard for the world and its ways, what it is, what it has and what it does! How truly the world shows for its part that it has no regard for God, what he is, what he has, what he does . . . (*Daily Readings With Martin Luther*, edited by James Atkinson, Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Il., 1987, p.83)

On this glorious Day of Resurrection we are confronted with . . .

GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS OWN

I. The Way Things Are.

I would think we are, by now, aware of the growing antagonism toward Biblical Christianity from atheists and the so-called progressive left. The 17th to 18th century English cleric, Charles Colton wrote: "An atheist will try to make proselytes even to a system so forlorn, and so gloomy as his. And he will try it on the same principle that causes children to cry at night...he is afraid to be alone in the dark."

I have stated at funerals here that while the atheist rejects God, an after-life - heaven and hell - they will still have to face that final moment; that moment of sucking in the last breath of earthly air, exhaling, the heart's last beat, and that moment of face-to-face confrontation with the other side.

Death! Unnatural. Frightening. All the cool euphemisms to characterize a person's departure from this world cannot - ever! - cover up the remarkable finality of that moment. It has been and always will be, as Scriptures say, "The wages of sin....". (Rom 6:23a)

Not only is there the cold reality of death, but there are all the other consequences of sin which God spelled out in Genesis 3. Consequences every human experiences to one degree or another. For the woman "pain in childbearing...Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.", or, for the unmarried woman there's the conflict with what we call chauvinism. (Gen. 3:16) For the man, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life...By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...". (Gen. 3:17-19) How about the struggles in the work place, lay offs, factories leaving or closing down, political maneuvering of job positions.

All this doesn't take into consideration the untold complications that weigh and wear on life; everything from aging, affliction, anger, hatred and war to physical, mental, and emotional deformities and deficiencies. Or how about simply trying to find the right clothes to fit our sad bodies - the right hairdo that will make everything beautiful - the right shades of make-up and odors of perfumes and colognes to help one look and smell better. It's a long, long list, my dear friends. I've said it many times: when I think of these things I can hear Louis Armstrong singing, "What a wonderful world!" I don't think so. Not for a moment! It's a sinful, fallen world and those who deny God and eternity add nothing to it but gloom, conflict and the want of rules that will enable them to ignore the coming wailing and gnashing of teeth that will greet them on the other side!

Remember that statement from Luther: "How decisively God shows that he has no regard for the world and its ways, what it is, what it has and what it does!" Indeed, the festering of human sin will not cease until that moment - that one moment - the end!

II. God's Regard For His Own.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said, to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." (Lk. 24:1-6a)

And there it is. The glory of this morning. Stated negatively, Easter is not the promise of a better life with this world. Stated positively, Easter is the complete and final victory over that which is dreaded and cannot be side-stepped: the grave! It is the resurrected body, never again subjected to decay and death because of sin.

Recall the words of Paul: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." (I Cor. 15:56) The law of God condemns us and reminds us of the on-going struggle with sin. Again, "The sting of death is sin." And again, "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23a)

However, we are always drawn to our Lord's final words from the Cross: "It is finished." The price for our sin has been paid in full. No further payment can be made. Satan will use our struggle with sin to condemn and drag us into hell! But God's Word rings loud and clear: "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ." (Rom. 8:1) We can, face-to-face, confront the vileness of Satan and his hell with the promise: "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23)

This is God's regard for His own. And "regard" for his own implies protective care for His own. Most of you are, by now, very familiar with the words of Paul in First Corinthians: "...God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the (worldly) wise; God chose what is weak...what is low and despised...even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are (things, people who think they're something God must love). (I Cor. 1:27-28) He took us - nothing - and made us His own, worked faith in us to know His forgiveness and promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. And do you know why He did that? Because He loved us and wanted to. That's it! You can go no further with an explanation.

Luther's insight is absolutely correct: "How truly the world shows for its part that it has no regard for God, what he is, what he has, what he does...". You really don't have to observe this world, its media, its self-estimation for very long to discover that this world really has no regard for God other than as an object of mockery and vilification! The only gods it worships are the ones it creates in its miserable, sinful image!

III. The Promised Victory.

You might recall an old story that originated in Poland about a poor, old man named Yosef. Here's the story:

"Yosef...struggled every day to earn a few kopeks gathering loose twigs and scraps of wood and selling them for firewood. He had grown too old, he moved too slowly, his back ached too much to do it any more. 'Oh, God, who needs this life?' he said, over and over. 'I'm tired of it.'

"One day as he was gathering wood, his full sack split wide open and the lumber fell all over the cobblestones. He looked at the shambles and lamented with a head splitting cry, 'God, I told you I had enough. Take me away from this terrible place. Let me die.'

"At that moment, the Angel of Death appeared in front of him. 'You called for me?' he said. 'I am the Angel of Death. Can I help you?'

"Yosef gulped. 'Why, sure,' he said after a minute. 'Could you help me pick up these sticks?'" (Maurice Lamm, *The Power of Hope - The One Essential of life and love*, New York: Rawson Associates, 1995, p. 122)

Have you been there? Done that? "I can't take it anymore! I want out of here!" Oh, I understand the burning desire for Jesus to come back, bring this world to its end and get us all out of here. And I understand the desire to be with Jesus. But an eyeball to eyeball confrontation with our mortality can rock the boat rather hard.

But that's why we're here, isn't it? Not to live in fear of the inevitable. But to live in anticipation of Jesus' promise to us: "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn. 14:3) And to be with Him is to be in eternal - forever and ever - uninterrupted peace, happiness, bliss, and love beyond human comprehension. It's ours through faith and faith alone in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection!

It's God's regard for us and the promised Victory! Christ is risen! Blessed Easter!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott