

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2019

Romans 1:1-7:

“The Moment of Never Ending Real Life”

- I. The Moment Before the Manger.
- II. The Moment After the Manger.
- III. This Moment.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm introducing the sermon for this last Sunday of Advent with what I'm calling three moments for reflection. The first moment consists of these statements from Genesis 3:16-19: "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing'.... To Adam he said...'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...'". Thus, the beginning of life outside the Garden. The summary of what life has always been and will be outside the Garden: *pain, sweat, and death* interspersed with a lot of mundane time and the possibility of a number of good to really high times all culminating in the last time.

The second moment for reflection from St. Matthew 24:30: "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn (will groan with everlasting sorrow and regret), and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Thus, the answer to the thinking that humans will establish lasting peace and a heaven on earth. We won't.

The third moment for reflection from Revelation 20:15: "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Thus, there is a heaven and a hell that will greet every human. Delivery into one place or the other.

Christmas Eve is the day after tomorrow. Its significance is lost on most, and, I believe, has always been. God help you - every of one you - and me to move beyond this moment and embrace...

THE MOMENT OF NEVER ENDING REAL LIFE

I. The Moment Before the Manger. vs. 1-6

Most of you are familiar with the genealogy of pre-flood descendants given in Genesis 5. It starts with Adam and ends with Lamech, the father of Noah, along with the names of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. At the end of each descendent's name is the statement, "and he died." God is always true to His promises; in this case the one made to Adam and his descendants: "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This simply underscored the first promise God made regarding disobedience to Him - sin: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17b)

Pain, sweat, maybe some good moments, dying, death, dust. We can build all the monuments we want. We can beautify everything any way we want. We can spend whatever it takes to make us pretty, or handsome, or keep us young (or should I say, delude us into thinking we're keeping youthful), but the words are always there: "You shall surely die." But, all glory be to God, the opening of our text puts God's arms around us:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, when he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh... (vv. 1-3)

I'm calling this part of the sermon "The Moment Before the Manger." I know you know this, but the Apostle Paul addresses that, before the birth of Christ, God had already set His Gospel in place - our text calls it "the Gospel of God...concerning His Son...descended from David according to the flesh..." The Gospel, the Good news, of His Son who is God in the flesh.

Brothers and sisters, each day, as we walk through this world, we should have these words of Scripture in front of us: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." (Eph. 1:3,4) And that

forever. He chose in us Christ before the creation! Loved us so much that He brought us - descendants of Adam who were on a journey to life's end and eternal death - brought us into that **never ending moment real life!**

II. The Moment After the Manger.

Our text goes on to say:

...and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you (we) who are called to belong to Jesus Christ... (vv. 4-6)

I'm calling this part of the sermon "The Moment After The Manger" because it points us to what I'm calling **the what's to come** for this One whose birth we will remember. It's all tied to these words: "declared to be the Son of God...by his resurrection from the dead...". With these few words we travel through His birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection for all sin.

Everything of this world goes away. Everything but one: sin. It's always there. What I mean is this: God's hatred of sin will go with every human into eternity. You know this Scripture: "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23a) It's the same wage Adam earned: "for you are dust and to dust you shall return." It's the unending death Jesus described as "the outer darkness...in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...the eternal fire...eternal punishment." (Matt. 25:30,41,46)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David according to the flesh took on the flesh to address our sin, its wage and horror, by stepping in front of us and taking on the punishment. We can never allow ourselves to grow complacent about His Word, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" He would take on the full blast of hell for us. Without the blood of Christ to cover our sin we would forever and ever cry out, "I am forsaken!" We would forever agonize over the words of Abraham to the rich man in hell: "...remember that you in your lifetime received your good things (no matter how insignificant they might have appeared to us)...and you are in anguish." (Lk. 16:25) Forever!

However, because of our Lord Jesus, we are included in those words: "by his resurrection from the dead...we have received grace...(we) are called to belong to Jesus Christ." (Portions of verses 4-6) Our sins have been forgiven. God has pronounced us "not guilty!" Forever!

III. This Moment.

And that brings us to "This Moment" and the closing words of our text: "To all those in Rome who are loved and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 7) Here are the terms that mark us at this very moment in time: "called to be saints...Grace to you...peace from God." Let's take a look.

"Saints" properly defined are "The holy ones." Christians are made holy and complete through faith in Christ Jesus." ("The Lutheran Study Bible," English Standard Version, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 2009, p. 1904.) This is what you are, I am. Saints. Holy ones. Still sinners? Yes. But forgiven in Christ, and through faith and faith alone His holy ones. In heaven the sin will be forever gone!

Next is the term "Grace to you." Martin Luther's words on this are very clear, in one way quite simple, and filled with comfort:

"I am seeking, searching, thirsting for nothing else than a gracious God.

"Grace consists in this: that God is merciful to us, shows himself gracious for the sake of the Lord Christ, forgives all sins, and will not impute them to us for eternal death. That is grace: the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the Lord Christ, the covering-up of all sin.

"Grace makes the Law dear to us (because it takes away the condemnation we deserve for breaking the Law and placed it on Jesus). And then, sin is no more there (that is, it is forgiven and guilt is removed), and the Law is no longer against us, but with us (it is there to guide and help us)." (James Atkinson, editor, "Daily Readings with Martin Luther", Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Illinois, 1987, p. 48.)

And finally, the term, "peace from God." You will recall that Jesus promised, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (Jn. 14:27) I would connect the peace He gives to these words of Scripture: "...while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (that would include us)... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... If for while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." (Rom. 5:6, 8,10)

Though we still struggle with sin, we are not His enemies. He is not out to get us or mess-up our lives. We are forgiven of all sin. He is at peace with us. Because of Jesus, we have moved from death and dust, from grave and hell to **The Moment of Never Ending Real Life!**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott