

We confess in the second article of the Apostles' Creed that Jesus will come again to judge the quick and the dead. Today and for the next three weeks we will focus upon Jesus second coming. Woe to us! The end of the earth is coming and we are not ready. Woe to us! The old is passing away and we are not ready. Woe to us! Repent. Watch. Pray. Be prepared. Jesus is coming to judge the quick and the dead.

This weekend, on Friday and Saturday, several of our 5th thru 8th graders went to a youth retreat in Storm Lake. At the retreat we focused upon being able to make a defense for the hope that is in us as Christians. We focused on why we are Christians and why we want to be Christians and remain Christians. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ let me ask you a question: What is the hope that is in you? Why are you a Christian? Why are you here this morning?

As we focus upon the end of time, the Last Days, Jesus' second coming, we know that these end-time things, these trials and sufferings, these wars and rumors of wars, these betrayals and arrests, these sicknesses and demons, they must all come. Every earthquake and hurricane, and earthly devastation must come. Every bit of broken family, betraying spouse, and corrupt government must come. Every disease and despair and death is but a sign that the end is coming, they are a reminder that our sins are still with us, that death will have its day. We do not need to ask ourselves the question: Is there an increase of these things, these earthly devastations? Who can know? And you know what, it doesn't matter. We live now, at the end of time, as the Church on earth, as the Church militant has always lived, fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. We live our daily lives with the cross of Jesus before us. We live as baptized children of God humbling ourselves unto salvation, repenting of our sins, turning away from that which causes us to sin, begging for mercy, trusting in the forgiveness of sins, trusting in Jesus' promise of a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more tears, only rejoicing. In Jesus, who was born of a Virgin, who suffered and died under Pontius Pilate, who rose from the grave, ascended into heaven and will come again; that is where we place our hope and our trust, we are not afraid.

In our Old Testament lesson for today Job said, "Man who is born of woman is of a few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue." Those are words of despair. These are words of a man who has given up. And Job was wrong to despair. He was wrong to give up. For our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is not far off. Suffering and death is not the end. Jesus has had mercy upon us in our time of trouble. We need not be ashamed; our heavenly Father has heard our prayers for help and He has answered us. Christ has come, Christ is present now and Christ will come again. That is our hope.

Jesus has come down from heaven to become a Man, to be near us, to stop death's terror and reign, to end God's judgment, to take the Father's wrath upon Himself and to give us peace. Jesus has laid down His life on Good Friday and taken it up again for us on Easter morning. He can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. He brings life out of death. Jesus

purchases and wins us sinners from all sin, death and the power of the devil, by His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. He purges and purifies our souls with His very life. He cleanses and restores us. He forgives us. Despite our many sins, He still and always loves us. Do not be afraid. In the waters of Holy Baptism Jesus makes us clean and holy, we are recreated in His image. We are His and He is ours.

And while we wait for Jesus to descend from heaven, while we wait for the shout of a trumpet, while we wait for the voice of an archangel, our heavenly Father gathers us here, in His holy house, before His holy altar, to encourage and exhort and build up and strengthen us in our life together. We do not gather this day like vultures to eat a carcass. We are gathered together to eat the risen and living body of Jesus Christ our God and our Lord. He has tied Himself to the bread and wine for us to eat and drink and be nourished. We are gathered together to comfort each other as the communion of saints, as children of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus has made a promise that will not fail. He cannot lie. He will not lie. Jesus brings us here and provides for our need, we shall not be in want our cup runs over. So do not believe the false prophets when they point around and say: "Look inside yourself and find the Christ." Jesus is not in our heart. Rather, follow the Shepherd's Voice. Hear His Word. He is where He has promised to be, where He feeds His people.

Jesus' presence among us is like lightening that is seen all over the earth at once. Jesus is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning over heaven and earth; and Jesus is here on earth for us to eat in the Sacrament of the Altar. That is what He has said, what He has promised. He is here in our assembly speaking to us, forgiving us. He does not turn us away. He does not cast us out. He is not ashamed of us. He is not angry with us. He loves us! He keeps His Word. We eat His Body. We drink His Blood. Our sins are removed and we are His. We are the center of His Universe.

Violence will come, but God our Father has not forgotten us. The kingdom of heaven will suffer attack, but the gates of Hell will not prevail. By the cross, our Father has delivered us and declared us to be His holy people. He brings good things out of bad. He brings hope out of discouragement. He brings comfort out of discouragement. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, of whom Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Jesus has been made life out of death. Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body. Our hope is in Jesus, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, He leads us to pastures green. He leads us beside still waters. He restores our soul. And even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil for Jesus is with us, His rod and His staff they comfort us and we will live in the house of the Lord forever. Do not be afraid of change. For Jesus is our God. Do not be afraid of suffering and the great tribulation. Jesus is alive, He has risen from the dead, He has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us and He is coming back, just as He promised, to receive us unto Himself, that where He is there we would be also.

The final verse of the processional hymn sang: Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war, She waits the consummation of peace forevermore, till with the vision glorious He longing eyes are blest and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest. That is our hope. That is our comfort. That is our strength and our song. That is what Jesus has promised us and He will give us. In His holy name. Amen.