

December 5, 2021
Second Sunday in Advent

“Living in the Present of Christ”

Luke 3:1-14

Not too often, but every once in a while, I happen to run into somebody who is really obsessed with the judgement and how everything is going to play out upon Christ’s return. Usually they are some type of premillennialist, believing in the Rapture, then a seven year tribulation, then Jesus coming to set up a 1000-year reign on earth before the final judgment and new heaven and new earth...or something along those lines.

Lutherans, or course, don’t subscribe to this line of thinking. We know Judgment Day is Christ’s return and that’s it, end of story for sin, Satan and the fallen world—jump straight to new heaven and new earth in a blissful eternity for believers. But that doesn’t mean premillennialists aren’t believers—they are believing Christians holding significant errors in this area, and not all of them obsess over it.

But when I find one who does and he or she finds out that I’m a pastor...well they get excited and start talking about the End Times, the antichrist, the rapture, the tribulation and whatever else. And I’ve got to admit that I enjoy a little wicked fun in listening to them excitedly talk and question and then taking the wind out of their sails in saying “...and, so what?”

Really. So what? Even if all the crazy premillennialist stuff in those Left Behind books and movies about the end of the world is true...so what? How does any of that change how one lives as a Christian right now, this very day on earth? It doesn’t. Not really.

And why do folks go for stuff like that; get so caught up in it? Why do they take the symbolism in the Book of Revelation, turn it into some fantastical future history and in many cases make that the centerpiece of their theology and even their faith? I think it is simply because it is bizarre, fantastical and exciting—and that’s what Christians want.

Maybe I’m wrong here, maybe some folks aren’t like this. But wouldn’t most of you give your right arm for the Holy Spirit just to take hold of you with amazing power and wonder like we read about happening to believers in the book of Acts? As we await Christ’s return don’t you wish you possessed an all-consuming zeal fully trusting in God’s promises so deeply that it erased all doubt and guided you steadfastly in faith in every area of your life? Don’t you wish God spoke directly to you like the prophets of old? Don’t you yearn for God to reach into your life and do some spectacular and exciting divine razzle dazzle that make’s your Christian walk a grand adventure in Jesus?

I do. I’d love to be a super-duper theological whiz kid, understanding the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible with brilliance and spouting the Gospel in such deep, insightful, interesting and entertaining ways that folks crowded in here from miles around and converted to faith in Jesus by the dozens. I think we all want to be able to serve God in ways above and beyond our mundane existence so that upon Christ’s return He will look upon us and say, “Wow. You ARE my good and faithful servant. Good for you! Gold star!”

Now, I’m not knocking the heartfelt desire to serve the Lord better and more faithfully. Have at it. But pay attention to what John the Baptist tells folks they should be doing to prepare for the coming of Christ: The crowds asked him, “*What then shall we do?*” And he answered them, “*Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.*” Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “*Teacher, what shall we do?*” And he said to them, “*Collect no more than you are authorized to do.*” Soldiers also asked

him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

Does it sound like God is demanding us to be super-Christians? Not really. It sounds like we’re supposed to share, help those in need, do our jobs. In other words, you’re supposed to, in expectation of His arrival, simply be being the creatures that He created us to be.

We’re creatures fallen into sin, of course. So we should also be doing all things in repentance, turning away from our sins and living under the grace of God’s forgiveness. But living under grace doesn’t require super-faith, super-obedience, super-Christian. All it requires is Christ.

Listen to what God says through the prophet Malachi “*For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.*” Who is doing the purifying? Not you; Christ. If anybody is super-Christian, it’s Him. And in the prophet’s words of condemnation the losers aren’t those who failed to be good enough, it’s those who chose to not fear God and instead step outside of the Creator’s design into willful sin. “*I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.*”

So are we to be overly concerned with the fantastical, overwhelming, mysterious things of the End Times and the details of how God will pour out wrath and judgment upon the earth? No. Who cares? What is it that you know God has poured out on you in blessing right now? This life in Christ right here, right now. By virtue of the Holy Baptism He has done to you He has begun a good work of you, and your job, your duty, your privilege, is to strive to live your life doing the work He has placed in your care in love as best you can.

Does this mean Jesus is going to shine forth in your life in amazing and spectacular ways? Doubtful. True, the early church fathers and martyrs, the “saints”, certain theologians like Luther and Calvin came to be the stuff of legend in church history. But I bet most of those were just trying to do the job God had given them, and frankly they likely thought they were making a mess of it. Mother Teresa, of all people, struggled in faith despite all the good she did in the slums of India. And if you stop and think about the ways God Himself has ordained for our salvation to be delivered, why would we even expect the flamboyant?

Some words and water applied to one’s flesh; common bread and wine consecrated and consumed; a truth found in some ancient texts proclaimed; does any of this appear fantastical and awe inspiring in the eyes of men? Not at all. Yet God’s promise lies within and accomplishes the forgiveness He intends.

And look at the pinnacle of God’s salvation work itself: a man suffering and dying naked on the cross. Jesus doesn’t look like God being forsaken under the burden of our sins. True, the world reacted to His sacrifice and death with darkness, earthquake and some wonders. But the Christ doing the deed? Looks like some dead guy...like a lot of other dead guys in the world.

Even the glorious resurrection and appearances thereafter; Christ doesn’t do it in glory for the whole world to see. He does it privately with those who believe, and even then He doesn’t look magnificent and other-worldly. Holes in His flesh—okay, that’s weird, maybe kind of gross, but not what you’d call a display of divine magnificence.

My point in all of this is just to reassure you that Christ is at work in you. You don’t need to be terrified and obsessed with His return in glory. Know that He is indeed coming, but live in

the present, trusting His forgiveness and living out the love He has poured out upon you in the simple things of the life here with which He has blessed you.

Yes, you'll mess this up. You're not super-Christian. You're a redeemed sinner. So live in the forgiveness Christ, the only super-Christian, has accomplished for you.

St. Paul was not writing to a bunch of perfect Christians dazzling their world with incredible faith and works of love. He was writing to a church full of baptized sinners like you. But knowing into whom they were baptized he could confidently speak this truth into their mundane-looking Christian lives: *"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

Don't fear or obsess over that day. Just know that it is Christ doing the work, and rejoice that on that day His work in you will be complete and will then be forever glorious.

Amen.