

Judgment Day

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Son of Man whose Kingdom is forever, amen.

When I knew this reading was coming I began to feel a good bit of anxiety. I've never preached on the apocalyptic writing of the book of Daniel. (SLIDE) I did take an entire seminary course on the book of Revelation, but never really had the opportunity to preach on things like the beast or the meaning behind some of these really weird images that first appear in Daniel and then later reimagined by John in his book of revelation. So many people have written about the end times with such certainty, but in my humble opinion, they're all just guessing. In Mark's Gospel Jesus addresses the question of when these end times will happen when he instructed the disciples, "³² But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come." (Mk. 13:32-33) Most scholars believe these apocalyptic writings actually came during or after most of the events they describe, So, while they talk about the end times, they're actually talking about events current at the time of the original author using images of beasts and other strange and sometimes scary events as a sort of code language that the common readers and hearers of the day would understand, but the rulers of the evil empires being referred to would not. So, when we read these apocalyptic writings, please keep that in mind and remember, as our scripture for today spells out, God is

Judgment Day

always in charge and will give all power and authority to the Holy Saints.

(SLIDE) Folks the Holy Saints are you and me. We already have all the power and authority we need to live under God's reign of love and peace, if only we would stop looking to and waiting for the end of time for the answers.

My studies for this week proved to be a learning blessing. I just love it when God's word shows me something that to me is brand new. That's what happened when I tried to go back to the Hebrew text to look up some of the key words from our reading. What I discovered was this dream and the interpretation of the dream were not written in Hebrew like over 98% of the Old Testament. It was written in a language called Aramaic. In the Bible, the Aramaic language is only found here in Daniel and in the book of Ezra in the Old Testament. There are also 2 places in the New Testament that were not written in the Greek language, but also in Aramaic. When Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer to his disciples, that was Aramaic. When God was revealing His Word, the Hebrew parts of the Bible were intended to be read by people who could read Hebrew. The Greek parts were intended for a Greek speaking audience. So, why did God reveal these few portions of His Word in Aramaic? I did a little research and discovered Aramaic was, in ancient times, the most universal language. (SLIDE) Here's a map showing the extent of the ancient use of the Aramaic language. Most people all around the known world spoke or did business in the Aramaic language. Just like English is today, Aramaic

Judgment Day

was the international language. So, evidently, God wanted *this* scripture, along with Jesus *giving us the Lord's prayer* to be read and understood, not just by Hebrew speaking Jews or later, Greek speaking Jews, but by the entire known world! I think I get why God wants everyone to know the Lord's Prayer, but what is there about this dream of Daniel that God want's the entire world to know? The first commentary I picked up claimed this chapter with this dream and its interpretation are the pivotal, most important parts of the entire book of Daniel. Now that we all know God's universal intention for this story I must add that this story might be one of the most important stories in the entire Old Testament.

So, what is it God wants all of us to know. The crux of the matter in this reading is Judgment Day. (SLIDE) We Lutherans don't like to talk about Judgment Day, but this super important, universal reading of scripture tells us it is coming and every single one of us and everyone who has ever lived including those not yet born, will one day come face to face with the Ancient of Days, surrounded by all the hosts of heaven where the books will be opened. The first of these books is the entire record of our lives. This book will be opened and read into the holy record. When I did a little research about the opening of this Book, a myriad of emotions swept through me. I first became afraid, because I know I've done things and failed to do things I should have done. There are so many I can't even count or remember them all. Some of the things I've done I've justified and

Judgment Day

some I have no excuses for. So, opening the book of my life scares me. Once I got past the initial terror of facing judgment for my actions, I began to feel a little creeped out. I mean if my whole life is being recorded in God's book, I'm sort of living a cosmic version of Big Brother. Have you seen any episodes of that show? PJ watches it quite a lot... (SLIDE) The premise is all these people are locked in a house with cameras literally everywhere. Someone's always watching and none of the players actions are done in secret. That doesn't stop the shenanigans. In the end each player is judged until only one is left and that one gets the prize money. This Book of our deeds and misdeeds reminds me of the Big Brother TV show... Once I began to seriously process this tidbit from God, I began to look at my remaining days a little differently. I don't want my book to be so negative. I actually do love God, especially the God I know in Jesus Christ, and I want to live my life in ways that please God. Unfortunately, the vast witness of Holy Scripture tells us we cannot ever hope to please God because God abhors sin and we love to wallow in it. If all there is to our existence is the judgment we face when the book of our life is read in open court, we will all certainly be condemned. (SLIDE)

This political season the democratic ticket is using the campaign phrase Hope and Joy. Where is our hope if all our deeds are finally exposed and the Holy One, the Ancient of Days, passes judgment? The good news is that our scripture readings and the witness of scripture talk about another book that will be opened.

Judgment Day

This second book is called the Book of Life. (SLIDE) In that Book is written the names of all those whom Jesus came to save from the coming judgment. Your name and mine are written in that book. You and I need not fear the coming Judgment Day because God, In Jesus Christ, has written your name and mine in the Book of life. Our names were written in the very blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus and the saving grace God has freely given to us through Jesus that we can be at peace with God and know our eternal salvation is secure. Yes, there will be judgment, but after the guilty verdict comes the sentencing. During the sentencing, right there next to your name the sentence reads, (SLIDE) "Paid in full by Jesus Christ!"

My you never fear your day of judgment because the sentence has already been served by Jesus. May this story about Judgment Day be properly understood by not just Hebrew speaking or Greek speaking Jews, but by every man, woman, and child on the face of this planet, just as God intended. May the coming judgment help us all to work even harder to spread God's love and forgiveness to all the nooks and crannies and corners of God's Kingdom. And may you ever rejoice in the love of God bought and paid for by your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.