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Advent 2 – 2 Peter 3:8-14 – Prepare for the Lord’s Coming!

12/2-6/20 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

Slowly the decorations start to go up. Slowly the presents start to appear. Slowly the goodies start to be made, and more and more everyone can tell – Christmas is coming! The signs of the times are all around. You hear the Christmas music playing, you hear the bells ringing around town, and you hear the preachers preaching, prepare your hearts, because the Lord is coming!

And at this time of year, that’s a concept that looks backwards as well as forwards. Yes, we look back to our greatest gift that was given to us as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and we look forward to giving and getting gifts as little reminders of that. But we also remember when our Lord came first in lowliness, and we look forward to when he will come again in glory. And just like all those children who keep asking, “When is Christmas going to come? Is it here yet?”, we find ourselves asking that a lot of times, too. We who live under the burdens of this sinful world long for Christ’s appearing, and rightly so because he promises that when he does he’s going to make everything right for us again. And that’s exactly why Peter wrote the way he did in our Epistle lesson for today. He knew Christ was coming, because he promised it – and our Savior never lies to us – and the Lord and the Apostle both want us to have that same confidence. “Prepare for the Lord’s coming!” he tells us, and the way we do that is to believe it and then to live like it.

Prepare for the Lord’s coming, because he’s coming soon! That’s the hopeful rallying cry of all of God’s people as we look toward heaven, and our response has always been simple: Amen, come quickly, Lord Jesus! But yet still we wait, almost 2,000 years later. Is that supposed to be *soon*? Is that anyone’s idea of what it means to be *quick*?

Well, even back in Peter’s day they were wondering those same things. Even only thirty years after Jesus ascended back into heaven, there were already people who were starting to get impatient. But even more than that, there were people looking from the outside in and scoffing. “Oh ya, he’s coming soon, alright. If he were going to come, wouldn’t he be here by now? Where is this coming he promised? ‘Prepare your hearts’ – give me a break. What a waste of time.”

And I’m sure you can see where they’re coming from, can’t you? I have to think that those same thoughts probably crept into the heads of many believers in those days, too. Why is Jesus letting us go through these persecutions? Why doesn’t he step in to stop all the people who are hurting us? Why doesn’t he come back and put an end to all this suffering and evil once and for all? And those questions haven’t changed after all these years either. We still have those same questions when we’re hurting. So many people hate Christians nowadays. So many people attack God’s Word and everything we believe. Lots of Christians around the world are even in danger of dying for their faith right at this very moment. And what’s more, every bit of pain and sadness and suffering and mourning we go through just makes it hurt all the more that it seems like Jesus isn’t doing anything about it... at least yet.

It can be frustrating, no doubt. We look up to heaven from our perspective, and we see slowness... even sometimes it might seem like carelessness. But that’s why it’s important that Peter reminds us of Christ’s perspective as he looks down on us: “*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*”

See, our Lord Jesus Christ is not slow in keeping his promise to return one day. The day of his return has always been fixed, and it is still coming just as fast and just as certainly as it always has. The fact that we don’t know when it’s going to be doesn’t change that. But as we yearn for his coming and the end of our sufferings here in this sinful world, Peter calls us to remember that our wait has nothing to do with Christ’s slowness and everything to do with his mercy, because the longer he waits, the more opportunity we have to spread the Gospel message in the world, and the more people will be able to hear it, believe it, and be saved.

Yes, it may seem hard sometimes and the wait may seem long. But our God gives us the perspective of faith to see his higher plans and purposes. Our God knows eternity, and he promises that one day we will, too – and in comparison with that, the troubles and delays we go through here really will seem just light and momentary. Jesus promises us that the hard things we go through now are one day going to pass away, they’ll be like a bad dream or the blink of an eye, but the faithful work we do as Christian people and the Gospel message we spread in his service are going to bring precious souls to heaven forever. That means the temporary

negatives we have to suffer because we live in this sinful world will finally be totally outweighed and overshadowed by all the positives we get to be a part of here that will live on into eternity.

As Peter says, *“the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”* The day is surely drawing near when Jesus will come back and will destroy this broken world and forever do away with everything that hurts us now. All the suffering that God’s people have gone through at the hands of those scoffers, at the hands of God’s enemies, will all finally be rewarded when at last God vindicates his people, when he proves in that day that the faith in our hearts and the attitudes and actions that flow from it really were good and right in his sight all along. Then everyone will know just how true that old adage is: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

So don’t let the devil and this world fool you into thinking that the Lord isn’t coming or that he doesn’t care, because he certainly does. The Lord is waiting to come back because he’s giving you more time to prepare your hearts and to serve him and glorify him in this world. He means to drive you not to apathy, but to evangelism! And he tells you in the meantime simply to trust him – to trust that his plans, his purposes, and his timeline are best – and then to wait in hopeful expectation. Believe that he lived for you, he died for you, he rose for you; believe that he’s in heaven right now preparing a place for you; and believe that when the time is right, he’s going to come back for us to bring us and many others through us to be with him there forever.

That is a great hope. And just like so many people get giddy preparing for the coming of Christmas, your Savior wants you to be giddy in preparing for his coming on the Last Day. It’s exciting to think about, exciting to look forward to, and it changes our whole attitude and mindset. And so as we wait in hope, Peter tells us the same thing that John the Baptist said in his day and the same thing that the prophets said before him: you have the certain, blessed hope for eternal life in heavenly perfection, so live like it and reflect that hope through your God-pleasing and God-glorifying lives. *“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of*

*righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”*

Maybe you’ve heard the phrase, “Don’t dress for the job you have; dress for the job you want.” The idea is to be forward-focused and to prepare now for the greater things that are ahead for you. It’s the same kind of idea that Peter tells us about here. Don’t live for this life and this world, because one day soon they’re going to pass away. Live for eternity, live for what really lasts, live in such a way that when your Lord does return he will commend you for your good and faithful service in his Name. Strive to live in a way that is spotless and blameless, in a way that is truly good and right, because that’s the outward reflection of what God has already made you inside when he washed you in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Live with that special peace that only Jesus can give, that peace that transcends all understanding, because that’s the kind of unshakable, eternal, spiritual peace that we have only through salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Yes, heaven is our home, where one day everything will be right again. So since that’s where we’re headed and since that’s where Jesus is going to take us one day, let’s show it. Let’s live as true children of God, let’s shine the love of our Savior and our heavenly Father, and let’s stay always faithful through Word and Sacrament even in a faithless world, because that’s how we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord!

So really, as we look for the Lord’s coming, it’s all a matter of perspective. Unbelievers look at the last 2,000 years and this sinful world in chaos and only getting worse, and they scoff. *Oh ya, I’m sure Jesus is really coming back any time now.* But for believers, as we prepare our hearts for Jesus’ coming and as we believe with every certainty that he is coming and soon, we look back on the last 2,000+ years of human history and everything God has done for this world and his people in bringing us to faith and promising us heaven, and we see grace and patience and mercy – the same patience and mercy that our Lord has with us whenever we sin and turn back to him for forgiveness, the same patience and mercy that reassures us that we are his children, that we belong to him, that heaven is our home, and that one day everything that’s wrong with us and with this sinful world will be a distant memory. And so we pray with hope and eager anticipation, just like Peter and all of God’s people: come quickly, Lord Jesus! Just as you came first to win us salvation, so also now prepare our hearts for your coming again to bring us to your salvation forever. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.