

“Living with the Sense of Urgency”

1 Corinthians 7.29-31

3rd Sunday after the Epiphany 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation is written down for our instruction and life in the Apostle Paul's First Epistle, the 7th chapter, beginning with this 29th verse “But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.”

In many aspects of our lives we live with a sense of urgency. We know that bills must be paid on time. For students homework must be completed on schedule. Projects must be accomplished according to an appointed timeframe. Until these and more are satisfied in our lives, we live with the sense of urgency and are driven to fulfill the task and to be free of its burden, even if for a brief time.

As the Scripture reading from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Church in Corinth indicates today, we as Christians are to be found living with the sense of urgency. The time is short, St. Paul says, the form of this world is passing away. The day is coming when the occasion for godly work as well as for repentance will end. The time is fast approaching when God will judge the world as we confess in our church's Creeds. As God's people we are to be living with the sense of urgency, knowing that when Jesus says “Follow Me” He means now and forever.

We are to live, quite honestly, with the mindset of the Ninevites to whom Jonah preached, who repented immediately upon hearing the Word of God. As disciples Jesus we are never to put off performing those works that God exhorts us to do. We are not to live with the attitude that we always will have time to change this or that, to go to church more or go again for the first time, to go to Bible Class, to start our home devotions, to pray on a daily basis and more. As the saying goes, “many who plan to seek God at the 11th hour die at 10:30.”

We are, instead, to live like today and every day is the last, not with a sense of morbidity but with the sense of urgency knowing that this is how God would have us live as His people, as those who know the time is short and that this present age is passing

away. Notice how St. Paul explains this in our sermon reading. We are to live as if there is nothing else to live for – if married, as if you are not married; if weeping, as if you are not weeping; if rejoicing, as if you are not rejoicing; if possessing, as if you are not possessing. Otherwise, we are misusing the blessings that God has granted us in this world and time.

But it is not always easy to maintain such a mindset and lifestyle. Even in the other areas of our lives we can find it exhausting to maintain a high level of commitment and dedication. Even the most disciplined and take charge personalities among us have to admit that there are times that we let things go, times that we become a bit complacent and less diligent. We also know that there are times that we just want a break, some time to depart from the rigors of our daily routines and let life pass us by for a while. Of course, some of us are just born procrastinators. Do not do today what can be done tomorrow or the next day or the next. The only urgency that such individuals feel is the desire not to overdue it even if it means greater stress as a deadline approaches.

Just as we deal with this in the other areas of our lives, so also do we have to confront this in our spiritual lives. Living with the sense of urgency escapes us at times and we end up letting up, we attempt to coast, and we relinquish the new man's desire for the ease of the Old Man's schedule. We do not always apply ourselves to Godly wisdom and living and we behave and act this way because we do not live with the sense of urgency that we are to have and exercise as the people of God.

In fact, some may even expect someone else to pick up the slack while others run away from the works given us by God to perform in our lives as did Jonah because we don't like the amount of commitment and dedication to the Lord that it requires. After all, it is easier to turn our heads, is it not, rather than apply the effort needed to address the issues of abortion, sexual immorality, and the like in our lives and communities around us.

But this is not living as though we recognize that the time is short and that this world is passing away. Think, if you will, how you are when you know that a task must be completed quickly and soon. Though you may be tempted to put it off, you know that you will eventually have to get down to brass tacks and knuckle down to

complete it. You have to give it your all and apply yourself with all that you have in order to finish the project on time. You and I know how it is to live with the sense of urgency in many parts of our lives.

Yet, when it comes to our spiritual lives we do not live with the sense of urgency that we ought. We fail to understand and comprehend for whatever reasons that following Jesus involves living with the sense of urgency that we always have to commit and recommit, dedicate and rededicate ourselves to our Lord and His way through repentance and faith in His holy name. To do anything less is not to live with the sense of urgency that St. Paul teaches us that we are to live with as God's people.

But we know as hard as we may try that we do not maintain this mindset and attitude in our lives. Just as we grow content with our routine and dedication in many areas in our lives, so we do with our lives before God. This is not pleasing to God and is worthy of His condemnation and judgment just as much as the deeds and evil works of the Ninevites justly deserved His punishment.

So today God calls us away from our sinful complacency and announces that for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior He has relented from visiting us with the punishment we deserve. He has relented for Jesus Christ has actually served the punishment for us when He suffered and died on the cross. For, on account of Christ and His saving work, we are granted forgiveness for all our sins, the proclamation that the judgment of God has been set aside since it had been set on Jesus when He was crucified and died for our salvation.

Forgiveness and pardon for our sins is given us for the sake of our Lord who lived His life with the sense of urgency, of commitment and dedication needed to rescue and deliver us from our sins. This is one of the aspects of Jesus' public ministry and work that the Gospel of St. Mark especially highlights. 40 times in his Gospel account St. Mark uses the word "immediately" or "straight away" to describe the urgency Jesus lived with as our Savior accomplishing our salvation.

Even in our Gospel reading for today noticed that St. Mark says Jesus immediately went around preaching the Gospel. Our Lord Christ immediately calls the first of His twelve disciples. He

doesn't waste any time, in other words. Jesus gets right down to business in His Public Ministry, in the task of fulfilling the Law for our salvation and delivering us from its punishment on our sin.

Jesus does all this and He does it immediately because He knows that He must do all these things as our Savior and for the life and salvation of you and me. So He immediately gets to work and soon we learn that in the fullness of the time appointed for Him He suffers and dies as our Redeemer, bearing all our transgressions and our sins on the cross pouring out His lifeblood as payment for our sins.

On account of His saving work we have been granted forgiveness of all our sins. God declares that since Jesus has borne the judgment for our sins and we have believed on Him, as did the Ninevites of old, He has relented of His punishment and gives us in its place eternal and celestial joy. Just as He in His mercy set aside and did not punish the Ninevites, so has He done for you and me. He has removed our sins in the blood of Jesus. He has washed us clean in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has forgiven us and given us robes of righteousness granting us entrance to the Heavenly Banquet feast that has no end.

By faith, forgiven and redeemed, we are given the power to live and the strength to do this on a daily basis with the sense of urgency St. Paul speaks of today. As we hear His Word, as we eat of His body and drink of His blood, He enables us to commit ourselves and dedicate ourselves daily to following Him and His ways, living with the sense of urgency that we are to have as His people.

“There's no time like the present” the saying goes. The Spirit of God would concur when it comes to our lives with Christ. Live knowing the time is short He says. Live knowing that this world is passing. Live knowing that Christ has saved you from your sins and has promised you life everlasting in heaven. God grant that we all be found living with the sense of urgency as He teaches us to do. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+