

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 23, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 611:1-5, 409:1, 496, 416, 410.

Lessons: Proverbs 10:11-13, 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13, Mark 13:31-37.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:7-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As people come to faith in Jesus Christ as the one who saved them from the dreadful wrath of God, their attitudes change. They change in the way they view their lives and other people. Their view of what is valuable and important changes. As the Spirit of the Lord changes the way they think, he also gives them power to make changes in their lives, changes that will please God, changes that will help other people grow closer to Christ, and changes that will keep their own souls from getting warped.

Because the end of all things is right around the corner, one should live accordingly,

LIVING FOR GOD AND SERVING FOR HIS GLORY

- 1. The end is near! Remain in control of yourselves!**
- 2. Show your love for one another in service for God.**

You heard last week that everyone, including pagans, "*will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*" (1Peter 4:5) Because the end of all things is near and will come at any moment, be sensible, Peter says, and especially be vigilant in prayer. As sure as redemption has been earned and salvation is ready for all men, as sure as the Judge of the living and the dead is prepared for the final Judgment and the apparent delay is only another gracious measure on His part to call men to repentance, so sure it is that the end of all things is near.

How does this impending return of Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead change the way in which we Christians think and live? The Word of God in front of us says: "*Be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply.*" God is talking about mental clarity. Self-control. Love.

There is only one Greek word for what is translated "*clear minded and self-controlled*". That is the word the King James Version translates "sober". Be sober. And the Greek word is not only used to mean be sober from not drinking wine, alcohol or using other drugs, but to be sane, level-headed, to be in your right mind. The New International Version is a good translation.

Thinking about the nearness of the end is a strong motive for Christians to exert all diligence in using the time allotted them on earth in a God-pleasing way. Their entire way of life should be one that agrees with God's Word, with sound Christian common sense, with that sober-mindedness which should be the strongest characteristic of the children of God. They must put aside all spiritual drowsiness and be wide awake, vigilant. In view of the nearness of the end they will be particularly diligent in their prayers, lest the dangers and tribulations of these last days overcome them. All the cares, joys, and sorrows of life must not be permitted to interfere with their relationship to God.

We need to see clearly what is before us, and see clearly what God wants from us. Two ideas come to mind. First, we cannot have our heads in the sand and thus not be able to see what is happening in the world around us, although we as God's children do not need to see all the wickedness and perversion in the world, and even in our own neighborhoods. We need to know that sin is rampant in the world so that we may warn all men

and ourselves against letting sin rule in our lives, as Paul warns in Romans 6:12: ***"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."***

Second, we need to realize that ***"Not everyone who says to [Jesus], 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*** (Matthew 7:21) There are many teachers and preachers in many churches pretending to proclaim the will of Jesus. We need to know God's truths so that we can point people to what God really does say. So you can see that it is essential that we know the Word of God, and can even use Scripture passages we have memorized so that the Word of God can work in people's lives. We need to be clear-minded in these last times.

We need to be ***"self-controlled"***. One writer spoke of this as choosing to beat down our sinful self – the old man – and letting our Christian self – the new man – set priorities and make choices. Peter says this will enable us to pray better – it's hard to feel like praying when you feel guilty over unrepented sin. It's hard to feel close to your heavenly Father when you have been pushing him away.

"Above all, love each other deeply." This exhorts believers to their ultimate responsibility and reminds them of the highest importance of love among God's people. Treating other people with love honors and worships God. This is the second part of the commandments, what we call the second table of the Ten Commandments, our responsibility to our fellow man. ***"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*** (Matthew 22:37-40) This blesses other people by reflecting God's love into their lives, and sweetens our own lives. Selfishness does not bring satisfaction. The very finest way to thank God for our own forgiveness is to show mercy to those who sin against us.

This will lead to prayer; prayer that calls upon God and submits to God, regardless of whatever evil may surround and attack us. We are reminded of Jesus' Words in Gethsemane: ***"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*** (Matthew 26:41)

Peter also offers some practical words for applying God's love in our lives. ***"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."*** Hospitality is generous and friendly treatment of visitors and guests. One writer gave the example of God's adult children 'sharing their toys'.

Christians will want to live and behave without selfishness, having only the welfare of their brother in mind. It is this love which is ready to cover and forget even a mass of sins, something which would not be possible if they had not received and come to understand God's tremendous love in sacrificing his only-begotten Son for their own sins. This love creates and preserves brotherly harmony and unity. It is the kind of love you heard about in our Epistle lesson. It is not a matter of generously overlooking one or two little faults, but of forgiving even a multitude of sins, and in forgiving, to forget them.

Another application of this love is found in the words: 'Be hospitable toward each other without grumbling'. This was necessary even more in those days of oppression and persecution than it is today, at least in our country. But in any event Christians will be ready to show true hospitality, to receive especially their Christian brothers and sisters with open arms whenever there is need of it. They will do this, not with an unwilling grumbling, but with a cordiality flowing out of true love.

Peter then speaks especially of serving fellow Christians in ways that make us think of our congregational lives. ***"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*** This is the entire area of what has been called "ministry", and it is not just for the called servant, the "minister". Every Christian is to look at whatever skills and abilities he or she has and dedicate them to serving God and meeting other people's needs. This isn't just in the public worship area, but in all the services that are done for God. How easy it is with our busy lives to omit serving God in this way. There are a multitude of things and services that can be done for God and for our fellow Christians.

One simple example is the facilities in which we worship. Many things can be done to clean, maintain, and improve those properties.

Remember how God called you royal priests? We read in 1 Peter 2:9: ***"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*** It gives worth and dignity to people's lives to see

themselves as Christ's partners in service. Every Christian is a part of the human network that God uses to distribute his love and grace. Every congregation needs to see that its ministry is not just what happens on Sunday mornings – at worship – or just what the pastor does. The ministry is carried on by all the members as they witness, encourage, rebuke and admonish, and pray for the people in their lives.

It all comes from God. It is he who has provided us with his truth to tell others. Those who are to speak in his name, whether formally called servants or everyone else, should derive all of their motivations and actions for service from the Bible. It is God who provides the strength for service. Those who feel weary can always go to him for spiritual recharging, and this is done by prayer and studying God's Holy Words.

Every one has received gifts of grace with which to serve one another as good stewards of the various graces of God. Notice that Scripture expressly states that every Christian has received some gift of grace, some talent which he should employ in the service of the Church of the Lord. Whether this gift is one of preaching, or of teaching, or of praying, or of exhorting, or of organizing, or serving in any way, it should be exercised by the Christian. No talent should be hidden away in the ground but put to use in the service of God. These gifts are not our own to use as we choose, especially not for selfish purposes. In receiving gifts from God, we have become stewards of God. We are responsible to Him. It is his will that our gifts should be exercised in serving one another, in proving ourselves useful in the work which we are carrying on at God's command, to the praise and honor of God and to the benefit and salvation of our neighbor.

Two such special gifts of grace are named here. ***“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.”*** If any one has received the gift of speaking, if he holds an office in which he is to speak the Words of God, he should adhere strictly to these revelations of God as they are contained in His inspired Word. For any man to proclaim himself a Christian teacher and then to preach his own human opinions and speculations, or only that which he chooses to consider true in the Bible, is an insult to the Lord. We think of pastors, teachers, Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School teachers, catechism teachers, even parents, that is, all who present the Word of God to others.

In a similar way those who are engaged in helping the poor and needy, in short, all Christians, as they take part in the work of love carried on in their midst, should remember that it is, in the final analysis, the work of the Lord which they are doing as His stewards. They will, then, certainly not depend upon their own strength nor seek to further any private schemes in their work, nor will they permit their hands to be idle while there is so much work to do.

Those gifts, those powers which God has granted Christians, and which He wants to continue to supply are to be used energetically and consistently. It is, in other words, the faithful, conscientious use of the gifts which God has given to a Christian which he desires from every one of them. And the final aim and purpose will always be that God's name may be glorified among men more and more. For it is from Him, as the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that we have received faith and the fruits of faith, and thus also the power to praise and glorify His holy name through the works which we perform in the building and maintaining of His kingdom. The power of God comes to us through Jesus Christ, to whom we give all praise and power now and throughout all eternity.

We find the word “Amen” here, meaning “Yea, yea, so shall it be” closing this section. This is certainly a fitting word, asking that all glory and power be God's forever. It is this very verse which forms our conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, ***“so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”***