Grace Lutheran Community, 25th November, 2018: [Last Sunday Church Year, Proper 29B)

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Jesus said, **21** Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so
also the Son gives life to whomsoever He wishes. **22** The Father judges no one
but has given all judgement to the Son, **23** so that all may honour the Son just as
they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour
the Father who sent Him. **24** Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears My word
and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come under
judgement, but has passed from death to life. **25** 'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is
coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God,
and those who hear will live. **26** For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He
has granted the Son also to have life in Himself; **27** and He has given Him
authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of Man. **28** Do not be
astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will
hear His voice **29** and will come out—those who have done good, to the
resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of
condemnation. John 5:21-29 *(NRSV)*

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There is a theme that runs throughout the whole of Scripture that we, as Christians, often don't talk about - and that is judgment day'. I'll come to some possible reasons why we may rather not talk about this in a moment, but first , let us recall some of the things the Bible does say about God judging us.

Right from the beginning - in the opening chapters of Genesis - God tells Adam and Eve, "You shall not eat or touch the fruit from the tree in the middle, *or you will die*." There is judgment for those who refuse to obey God's clear commands. Yet as the result of Adam's and Eve's sin - and our own sin - sin and death has entered the world. Accordingly, Cain is judged for his sin of murder; the people in the time of Noah are judged for their evil ways and willful rebellion against God; the people of Gomorrah and Sodom are judged for their sins of sodomy.

Our Lord Jesus also says 'the Son of Man' will come again to' judge the living and the dead'. In the Parable of Lazarus and Dives there is a pointed illustration of the pains of hell. Elsewhere Jesus says (Matthew 8:11-12): "Many will come from east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom (that is, of the devil) will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." There will be a judgment day'. Are you ready for that day?

In reflecting on 'judgment day' (a theme clear throughout Scripture) I wondered why we might be hesitant in talking about it, and death and dying, and standing before the Lord in eternity. I could think of at least four possible reasons *why* we might rather not talk about this topic.

The first reason is near to us all. Who wants to face the possibility that someone you know could die? Look around you - at your children, your spouse, your parents, or other family, or friends... What would you do if they were to die today? In our world we don't like to talk about death - we'd rather talk about 'living'. Yet so much of what passes as 'talking about life' is usually talk associated with the transitory and ephemeral things of this world.

A second reason we might rather not talk about 'judgment day' has to do with the fear of punishment. More than one person today has said "there is no hell" because "a loving God couldn't possibly send anyone to hell.'" But more than one Christian writer has said that one of the great tricks of the devil is to convince us that he is not real. As St Paul says, "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor.1:14). Hell is real. And without the possibility of eternal punishment the cross of Christ makes little sense.

A third reason we may rather not talk about judgment day is tied up with Jesus' words in our Gospel today: "Those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done, to the resurrection of condemnation." The Apostle Paul also says - along with other Apostles - "Each of us will have to give an account of ourselves to God" (Rom. 14:12).

If we are open to what the Bible says about standing before God one day to give an account of our lives, then that might mean we might have to change something in our lives right now - something we are doing, or not doing, which we know God says we should (as clearly spelt out in the Ten Commandments). But if - in our minds - we can 'push God aside for a little while' then 'maybe we can ignore for a little while what He says." [And this is not a 'salvation by works' but is - as Dr. Vic Pfitzner says in his commentary on John - "Salvation is a free gift received in faith, as this gospel continually stresses; but the genuineness of faith will be verified by the kind of life one has led (see Matthew 25:31-46, parable of the sheep and goats).

A fourth reason we might rather not talk about 'judgment day' concerns who God is Himself, and how we like to think of ourselves as being in control of our own lives. Dr. Herrmann Sasse, in a sermon "The Mystery of the Last Things", has said,

'We are in the middle of a revolution against God Himself. Like the people in the time of Noah, and at Sodom and Gomorrah, we no really longer believe that God is the righteous judge. God no longer judges us, we judge God.... In our day, forgiveness does not mean the payment for sins. Forgiveness means permissiveness. It means you no longer care about right and wrong. And so by our actions and inactions we judge God and believe that He is harsh and cruel to hold these sins up and act as if they mean anything. God no longer forgives us. We forgive ourselves." Sasse goes on to say, "And so, since we deny that God is the judge, we even try to deny death itself."

Our 'natural' human journey in this life (which is not the way God intended it to be) is from death to life. But, by faith in Jesus and in the Father, there is a reversal of

this process. As our Lord Jesus Christ has said to you today in the Gospel: "Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me *has* eternal life, and *does not come under judgment*, but *has passed* from death to life."

There is great comfort in the Gospel. Jesus - who is coming to judge the living and the dead - is the One who also says: "Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he die, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." (John 11:25-26). He has also prayed to us to His Father saying (John 17:24): "Father, I desire that those also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, and to see My glory."

Concerning Christ's Office to judge Dr. Sasse has said: "The Christian Church today is in danger of forgetting this great and wonderful message. In every generation the Church is in danger of forgetting and losing that wonderful judgment of God. But the King who comes to judge the living and the dead comes to judge you. And in that judgment, 0 Christian, lies your salvation." In Christ's judgment of us - on the cross - lies our salvation..." And because we know our sins have been washed away by His blood, we are ready to meet Him.

We can look forward to judgment day. Why? Remember Him who also said, "To those who are thirsty I will give the water of life.".

Whenever you think about the dead; whenever you go to a cemetery and stand at a grave; or whenever in spirit you stand near a distant grave; then hear the voice that says, "Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he die." In Jesus we are already judged and have been given life by faith. And so it is that now we can live this life with true hope and peace, always under the constancy of Christ's eternal love. Amen.