

# St. Paul: On The Same page

for 11.09.14 Pentecost 22a

## Day One: Amos 5:18-24

*Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light... But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

“Eschatology” (pronounced ES-kuh-TOL-uh-gee) is the study of the end times. You probably don’t use the word very often, but it is a subject that we all talk about.

One of the most popular shows on TV right now is about a “zombie apocalypse.” A new movie at the theaters is about the end of the world. A global pandemic, a climate disaster, a nuclear bomb, these have all been the subjects of many books and movies. Is all of this just fear mongering? Is there any reason we should pay attention?

The appointed lessons for the next three weeks focus on teachings about the end times. And there is a good reason for us to think about this. It’s not because we should be afraid. But it’s good for us to know

the end of things, the goal or destination of things. If you know where your trip is to end, then you know something about all the things you will pass along the way.

The prophet Amos tells us about the end, that it will not just be happiness and light. It will bring justice, the end of all those long injustices, all the things that are wrong or broken and we wish could be resolved.

Racism, slavery, hatred, oppression, sickness, poverty, lying, stealing, killing, all of these things will end at last. And they’ll not just stop, but they will be made right. Justice will come.

What difference does this make to us today? It means that we look at the troubles of today and long for the “day of the Lord,” not just for relief, but for God’s justice.

We work for justice now, but we know that God’s goodness will triumph at last.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I long for you to come again. But while I am here in this world, please help me to act with justice and righteousness and mercy. Amen.*

## Day Two: 1 Thess 4:13-18

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*

What does it mean to grieve... with hope?

Can you be sad, but with happiness? Can you be crying and happy at the same time?

We cry when a baby is born, partly out of an excess of emotion, but partly because in our happiness we also have a sort of vision of all the things ahead, both trials and triumphs, that this child and her parents will see. We know that her mother who has endured pain, and who now has joy, will know pain again as her daughter grows up and moves away. We can all see the future when a child is born. Perhaps that is why the oldest of us is often the most wistful.

We also laugh and cry at funerals, and there our laughter is usually prompted by remembering the blessings of the past. But if we could follow Paul's teaching we would laugh because of a clearer view of the future. We would weep because of our loss and loneliness in the

present time, but we would laugh because we remember that we will come to a great celebration, a reunion, a victory over death.

People who have no hope are unable to see anything but darkness in any direction. But those who have hope may stand in the shadows, but they can see the light from where they stand.

So we grieve because there is darkness in our lives. But we have hope – we see the future – we know the end of the story. Having an eschatology, we understand the end – that the end of life is not death. But our life ends in life, more life, eternal and perfect life!

So Paul says, "Therefore encourage each other with these words." What words? Perhaps we can encourage each other, give each other hope, with these words, "Christ is risen!"

**Prayer:** *Does someone need encouragement today, Lord? Send me. Give me words to speak, and hope to share, and send me to lift them up. Amen.*

### **Day Three: Matthew 25:1-13**

*At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

What is the longest line you have ever waited in?

A woman in Miami stood in line for 42 hours to get the new iPhone 6. That's not bad, considering that some people waited 110 hours for the original iPhone, and over 160 hours for the iPhone 3G. The typical wait to get in at one burger joint in Kentucky is 2 hours. Once you finally get inside Di Fara's Pizza in New York City, it might still take an hour for you to get your supper because every pizza is made by hand by the owner himself.

When people wait in long lines for a new product or tickets to a hot show, they find ways to help each other get by. Some hold the place for others to go get food or have a potty break. Some people come to provide music (for a donation) or they rent chairs, blankets, or battery chargers.

Jesus' story suggests that we might wear out while we wait for him. It is worth waiting for Jesus, our

Bridegroom, to come again. But it seems to take a long time, and there is a risk that we might give up.

How can prepare for, and look forward to, his coming again? How can we help each other wait?

When our waiting gets tough – when the “weather” turns cold and stormy and we are tempted to seek shelter in temporary earthly things, then we need to share our warmth and hope with one another.

So we urge each other to be in worship – we share the Lord's Supper with one another in order to be strengthened – we speak God's promises to one another to remind us what we're waiting for – we give to those who wait with us the water and the bread of life.

How long can you wait for Jesus? That might just depend on the faithfulness of your fellow believers. We are called to help one another wait.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, let my heart be like the heart of a bride who is waiting for the one who loves her. Fill me with an eagerness and joy that will endure through all things, and greet you at last on the great day. Amen.*

## Day Four:

From the explanation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism: *What do we pray for in the Second Petition? We do not pray that God's kingdom of power would come, because that is already present everywhere, but we ask God to give us His Holy Spirit so that we believe His Word and lead godly lives as members of His kingdom of grace; bring many others into His kingdom of grace; use us to extend His kingdom of grace; [and] hasten the coming of His kingdom of glory.*

Admit it. You were hoping that God would extend and improve an earthly kingdom with this week's election, weren't you? Even though you might be very cynical about politics by now, you were still hoping that God will bring some great person, or people, who will do all the right things to make a "Christian nation" or at least a really nice place here on earth.

But what kingdom is it, even here on earth, that God cares about? It is his "kingdom of grace," in which he is welcomed into the hearts of those who believe.

Yes, God does care about earthly things – about crops

and economies – about clean water and justice and peace. God even cares about your personal comfort and happiness.

But as important as those things can seem to us right now, none of those things will last very long. Not only our clothes and our cars, but also our houses and our cities and our nation will all pass away.

God cares most about those things that are eternal. And all of those people who struggle through this world's injustices and problems are people who will live forever, either with him or eternally separated from him.

We pray that earthly rulers will be just and honest. But what do we pray for in the Lord's Prayer? We pray that God's Kingdom of Grace may come – that more people may know God's love and mercy - and that they may live forever in his grace.

**Prayer:** *Come, Lord Jesus. Come and rule as our king – not over our politics – and not for the sake of our health care or our foreign policy or our economy. Lord, establish your kingdom in the hearts of our people that they may have real hope - forever. Amen.*