

**Sermon Draft (September 30, 2018)**

**Text: James 5:(1–12) 13–20**

**Sermon: New Ending in Christ**

The Sundays after Pentecost emphasize the Church's place between the salvation already accomplished by Christ and the final judgment that will take place on the Last Day. The Church is to share the Gospel. In the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Church confesses events in both the past and future tenses. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin, suffered, died, was buried, rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven; yet we also believe that this same Lord Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. Thus, the Church's life is the link that connects the past to the future, that joins the end to the beginning.

The Church gathers around the body and blood of Jesus, not only to remember his saving Passion but also to "proclaim" in the present "the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). We do this because of what Christ has prepared for us. The end changes the present.

The readings assigned for the Sundays after Pentecost call the faithful to order their lives now in remembrance of what Christ has done for us, but also in sober recognition of what is yet to come.

We are told that we can be anything we want to be. President of the United States! A little girl . . . though we were born a little boy. Comfortable in our retirement—just sit down today with a financial counselor who’ll take the time to listen to our goals. In our day and age, we assume that the present causes the future. And although things we do today, decisions we make today to change or form our earthly future we can rejoice in the fact that what Christ has done and has prepared for us in the future, in eternity changes our present.

For James in our Epistle this morning, we see how the end determines the present. ***“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains”*** (v 7). Knowing a harvest is coming at the end determines the farmer’s patience each day in the meantime.

And so, James teaches us, with life—when we know Jesus Christ and the end he has for us. James wants us to understand that the new end Christ gives us reshapes our present.

Death is the end that shapes our life in the present. Death is the inevitable end for all of us. The problem of thinking our present can make our future anything we want it to be is that we can't do anything about this end. *“Is anyone among you sick?”* (v 14a). That's not asking about a temporary discomfort. We're concerned about sickness because its end is death! Death can lead us to despair of the future.

Idolizing pleasure: *“Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 Corinthians 15:32). We've all been there in our lives, we just want to have fun now the heck with what we are supposed to do. We want to feel good no matter what the cost. We idolize the present: “Seize the day!” and “Just do it!” we'll worry about tomorrow later, maybe.

Surrender to indifference: Our life has no lasting or eternal value. It doesn't matter in the end anyway, right? Death can lead us to a zealotry about the future.

Denial of the certainty of death: We obsess over youth and health. It's my life and my choice. We can create our own future, make our own destiny. But how is all that going to work out in the end?

Christ is the way through death into a new end: the resurrection and the hope of eternal life. All we have and are is in Christ. Jesus is the Anointed One. Christ joins us in our weakness and in our inevitable descent toward death and Christ paves a new path out of death into life. Christ does not eliminate death but transforms it into the way of life.

***“And the Lord will raise him up”*** (v 15): We have a new end and thus new hope. The sick need not end in corruption; they can be healed and restored. The dead need not end in decay; they will surely be raised. The sinful need not end in condemnation; they can be forgiven.

Hope in the resurrection of Christ now shapes our life in the present. We are free to wait for the harvest. We are free to endure suffering and all kinds of trials in the present, whether illness or hardship. We are free to love one another and to lay down our lives for those we love.

And we are free to pray. Prayer in a person's life is like a window in a captive's prison. Without a window, the four walls of a prison limit one's life and perspective. The four walls define all that exists, and in such isolation, the prisoner has nowhere to go except into himself. However, if a window should be carved into the wall—even if it's barred and prevents escape—such a window opens the prisoner to another reality beyond the walls. The window testifies to another world beyond the present isolation; it allows the light of a distant horizon to invade the confined darkness of the dungeon. In short, it transforms the prison by the simple gift of hope, that is, by the belief that there is a reality that cannot be confined by the powers and rulers of this present darkness.

Prayer is an expression of hope. Prayer is hope trusting in the one who cannot be confined by the present darkness. Prayer is hope reaching out for the one who binds the tyrant and carves a door through the boundary of death. Prayer is hope holding on to the promise of the resurrection and the life of the world to come.

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”

(James 5:16).

It’s a very different perspective, the end determining the present. And when we know the beautiful end Christ has for us, ah, it’s a different life today. Amen