



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 8, 2009
2nd Sunday of Endtime
John 5:19-30
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Malachi 4:1-3
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90
Second Lesson: Hebrews 9:24-28
Gospel: John 5:19-30

Be Amazed at the Greater Things

In Christ you have crossed from death to life

In Christ you will stand in the Judgment

I've been blessed by my God to see many amazing things in my life. I got to go to the top of the Eifel Tower and look out over the City of Paris, which was pretty cool. I got to have Sunday Brunch at the top of a mountain in the Swiss Alps in a rotating restaurant so I could just sit there and see the scenery pass in front of me as the restaurant moved around one full rotation in an hour. That was pretty neat. I stood at the edge of the Grand Canyon and looked at it. I sat in the Roman Forum and ate a banana just about 20 yards away from where they say Julius Caesar was killed. I love history, so that was pretty cool. I saw the birth of my children. I've seen all kinds of amazing things. Even though we are living in a world that is ruined by sin, there are still a lot of amazing things to be seen. I lived for 12½ years right along the Mississippi River and got to drive almost every day into town and look across Lake Pepin and see the changing leaves and the sun play out on the other side of the Mississippi. It was gorgeous to see the rock cut and the bluffs and the eagles swoop down and get fish as I would drive down to Waubesa to preach during Lent. There have been all kinds of amazing things that I have seen.

I'm guessing that in your life you have seen an awful lot of amazing things too. Things that you just marvel at and you sit and think "Wow! What a wonderful world God has given us."

This morning our Savior says a couple of times, "I tell you the truth," which is kind of Jesus' way of saying to us, "Sit up and listen to this. This is pretty important for you to hear. I tell you the truth." Or in King James, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." Whenever he says that, he's kind of saying "Perk your ears up. Here is something important." He says that to us a couple times this morning and then comes to us and says, "Don't be amazed at these kinds of things," or "Don't be amazed at the things that you've seen. Be amazed at the greater things." Then he focuses on these greater things that the Son of Man has done in our lives, not in this world around us, but the things he's done in our lives to open the gates of heaven to us. He tells us "Be amazed at the greater things." Then he grabs us by the scruff of our neck and says, "Listen to this. You have crossed over from death to life, and that should change your focus." That should change your whole outlook on what truly is amazing as you live in this world.

He tells us that even though the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son, you don't have to be afraid when judgment comes. It's not a day of wrath or a day of mourning for you. Since you have crossed over from death to life, you can stand in the Judgment and look your Savior in the eye because you know how much he loves you. That's pretty amazing stuff. That certainly is the greater thing.

It's interesting to think about the greater things and see how God talks about them in the context of things that maybe you or I might just take for granted. You or I might just think, "Everybody knows that." Jesus is here talking and answering a question because the people, the Jews he was talking to were really upset with him. They were just "foaming at the mouth" upset because he had equated himself to the Father. As far as they were concerned, he was placing himself on the same level as the Father, and that was blasphemy. He was considering himself to be God and that to them was a sin worthy of death.

So then Jesus says, "Don't be amazed at what I just said, but look at these things. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man." He is talking about the spiritually dead the first time he said it in our text. "They will hear his voice and live." That time had already come. He had come and he was preaching. He was speaking. The dead heard it. Some believed and lived, and others remained in their unbelief and then their spiritual death.

The Jews of Jesus' day had believed that all judgment was entrusted to God, Yahweh. Jesus comes and says, "No, he's entrusted it to the Son of Man." The Son of Man is a term that Jesus has used for himself again and again. So they are just as upset as can be. When he says the Father and the Son are one, we say, "We know that. We've known that since we were little. Tell me something I don't know." But you have to understand the setting in which he is saying that. These people would just be furious with Jesus. What he is trying to get them to see is that they shouldn't focus on that. They should be more amazed at the greater things. "I have come to give you life. I've come to speak the good news that I am the answer to your sins. I live in your place and I will die in your place. All your sins will be taken away and you won't have to fear judgment because the One who has pled your case is the One who hears your case." Your defense attorney, the One who offered himself in your place, is the Judge that sits in the Judge's seat. When we are in Christ, we have crossed over from death to life. That's what God tells us to be amazed at. That's what is truly great and truly lasting.

Sometimes I really think we don't get this. I really believe that we kind of separate "God stuff" from the rest of our life at times. I tried to illustrate it with the Confirmation Class this week by drawing a wheel. The wheel represents all the different areas of your life; work, pleasure, family life, all the different segments of your life. If you take one chunk of that life out and say it doesn't belong to God, that wheel doesn't run so well, right?

Sometimes we act as though God is just the God of "God stuff" but he's not the God of my work life, or not the God of real life – that's a phrase I hear from time to time. "Oh Pastor. You're just a pastor. You don't understand what the 'real world' is about." Oh

really? I don't know what the real world is about? I go sit in a hospital room or a hospice room and hold the hand of the dying, but I don't know what the real world is about? What's it supposed to be about? Is it supposed to be about financial hardships or difficulties? Is it supposed to be about a bad economy or bad legislature? Is that the real world? Or is the real world what is coming? Are the greater things we are to be amazed at the things of the next life and that God tells us this life, the real world, isn't about here and now? It's about getting ready for heaven. The "real world" is to know that Jesus lived and died in your place so that when he comes again you can stand and lift up your head and look him in the eye. That's the real world.

Eternity goes on and on and on and on forever, and this world comes to an end. So if you get caught up in the things of this world as the "real world" and "God stuff" is something other than real life, Satan is winning and you are segmenting your life in a way that God has said "Do not do." *"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord"* (Romans 14:8). *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31). God says it over and over and over trying to get it through our heads to set your hearts on things above, not the things of this world, because this world will come and it will go. It might be painful as it comes and goes. It might be difficult as it comes and goes. It might be hard as it comes and goes, but do not set your hearts on things below. Set them on the greater things. The Son has given you eternal life.

Don't let Satan trip you up with the trap of just thinking about this world. Don't let him get you divided in this world. Cling desperately to Christ, as a drowning man would cling to a life preserver. Cling to him tighter than anything else you have ever clung to because the "real world" is the one that is coming. We've crossed over from spiritual death to spiritual life through the life and death of Jesus. He's washed our sins away in our baptism. He's given us his Word so that we grow in that faith. He gives us his very body and blood in case we are so thick headed that we just don't get it. He says, "This is the extent to which I have loved you. This is the extent to which I will always love you."

As we go through life and we find ourselves talking about people instead of to people, as we go through life and we worry about the things of this world, as we go through life and we doubt God's love or God's presence, know that we are sinners and we have sinned against our God. But know also that he loves us and has forgiven us because he has seen to it that we have crossed over from death to life.

It's a simple, straightforward truth, isn't it? Crossed over from death to life, yet Satan is still going to want to try to trip us up. He'll even use the words of God at times to try to trip us up. The words of God that I read to you this morning when Jesus says, *"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned"* (John 5:28, 29). Satan will get in your ears and say, "You've done evil. You are going to be condemned. You haven't always done

good.” Satan will say, “See, it’s about what you do, not about what Christ has done for you.”

So what enables you to stand in the face of judgment; the fact that you have done good or been good or tried to be good? Or do you have to be worried because you have done evil? And let me assure you, we all have done evil.

Here’s where knowing Scripture becomes so vitally important. God in his Scripture defines for us what is good. He says, “All your righteous deeds, all the good things you are doing are like filthy rags because you don’t do them out of love for me.” He says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” in Hebrews 11:6. Without faith it is impossible to please God. I don’t care how many outwardly good things you do while in this world, things the world considers good, things you consider good; if you aren’t doing them because you love God and if you aren’t doing what is according to his will, it is not good in his eyes. Only those who can “do good” are those who believe in Jesus.

Notice when Jesus talks about the Last Day, when he comes to judge the world and says, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was naked and you gave me clothes.” Do you remember the believers’ answer in Matthew 25? “Lord, when did we see you and do this?” Believers aren’t keeping track of what they have done and don’t say, “God, now you owe me something.” Believers love because Christ first loved us, and they just love. They don’t keep track of it and say, “Now you owe me something in return.”

And as far as that phrase “those who have done evil will rise to be condemned,” it isn’t a word there that means that you’ve done it once. It’s a word that means to be an ongoing evil. It means to be and continue to do this, and even outwardly good people do evil continually if they aren’t doing it out of love for Christ.

So you and I can stand in the Judgment and lift up our face and look at Jesus even though we are filthy rotten sinners. When mom and dad caught you doing something wrong, you didn’t look them in the eyes, did you? When Jesus comes back, we don’t have to be worried that he caught us doing something wrong, because we stand in Christ, and we are forgiven. So we lift up our eyes, and we look him in the face, and we can stand in the Judgment, because God has taken away our sins.

If you want to be amazed at the great things, don’t focus on the things of this world. Focus on the things of the world to come, and God will strengthen your heart.