**2nd Sunday in End Times: Last Judgment – Year B – November 11, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Hebrews 9:24-28 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**These things are certain…**

**I. Death and Judgment**

**II. Sacrifice and Salvation**

*For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. 25Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

They said it would be, “*The war to end all wars.”* So, when the armistice was signed at the 11th hour of the 11th month of 1918, there were those who believed they were seeing the last generation of military veterans. There would be no more war veterans after this, they thought, because there would be no more wars.

It pains us to think how naïve they were. The sons of these same troops would march off to fight over some of the same ground their fathers had once fought for. Sons of World War Two veterans would fly off to battle in some rice paddies in Southeast Asia. Sons and daughters of those veterans would head off to combat in two wars in the Middle East. And, it is not over yet.

Veterans Day makes us recall that thousands upon thousands of young Americans have gone to distant and dangerous places to keep death and danger from our shores. Veterans serve as a reminder of the failure of mankind to end war.

Jesus said that war is inevitable, and wars will increase in number as we march closer to judgment day. This morning in our lesson from Hebrews chapter 9, the author reminds us that some things are certain. In Vs27 he writes, “**Man is destined to die**.” It wasn’t always that way. In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in his image. This means they were holy, perfect, without sin and had a will that understood God’s will and was happy to carry it out. Mankind was destined to live forever in complete happiness, never get sick or depressed, never to grow old and die.

Sin ruined the image of God. Today, human beings are no longer born in God’s image. They are conceived and born in the image of Adam – that image is sin. With sin comes death. The Apostle Paul in Romans 5 wrote, “Death comes to all people because all have sin.” This means that death is certain for me and for you. This is not why you came to church this morning, to hear that you are going to die. In fact, you do not like to talk about it. In fact, funerals make you uneasy because you know that someday you will be the one lying in that casket. But the fact is, 10 out of 10 people die.

Man is destined to die because death is deserved. Paul says in Romans 3, “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” All have fallen short of God’s image. For example, let’s say that you wanted to attend a Louisville Cardinals or UK basketball game. You walk up to the ticket booth, the nice lady behind the glass says, “That’ll be $50 for your tickets.” You pull out $48 cash and say, “Here you go!” The nice lady smiles and says, “That’s not enough. You’re not getting your tickets.” God says that you and I must have the full amount of perfection to get into heaven. It’s quite simple, really. God demands that we live perfectly and completely according to his commandments, which can be summarized in two ways: love and trust God with your whole heart and soul and love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. If you do that, then you can have your tickets to heaven.

But God says we’ve all fallen short of his image. That doesn’t mean, me, does it? God tells us to trust him in all things. This was brought to my attention this week after the election. I read my friends’ posts on Facebook, read the editorials in the newspaper and spoke with some of our members and some of the Republicans and Independents seem to have this “Woe is us!” mentality because the president was reelected! Does not our God tell us to trust him, no matter what? Is he not our King who promises that all things are possible with him and that he will make all things work out for our good? When we are afraid of the economy, healthcare, and our own individual future, doesn’t that mean that we do not believe that God is in control? Then we have fallen short of God’s glory when we fail to trust him.

God also demands that we love our neighbor as much as ourselves. Two weeks our congregation held an open forum. We identified strengths and weaknesses, and one of the weakness we identified is that as a whole, we as members of this congregation are not good when it comes to approaching individuals when have we have an issue, small or big. Instead we gossip about it, complain, and bicker to everyone else except the one with whom they have the issue. Is this the patience, forgiveness, humility, and love for our neighbor that God expects and demands? No… we all have fallen short and deserve death.

Man is destined to die – it is certain. In fact, the writer adds in vs27, “**Man is destined to die once**.” This means there is no reincarnation. You will not come back as someone else or something else in a life to come. Which leads us to the second certainty. Vs27 “**Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment**.” This answers the question, “What happens to the human body upon death?” There is a separation of the soul from the body. The body is cremated or laid to rest in the coffin and decomposes, ash to ash, dust to dust. The soul meanwhile does not hang around to haunt a house or wander the earth. The soul is immediately escorted by the angels to stand before the Judge.

With what will stand before the Judge? What do we have to offer him for falling short of his demands? This is certain: we will die and will face judgment.

In 2008, 49 American Soldiers found themselves constructing a COP, combat outpost, in the rugged Northeast province of Afghanistan, just outside of the village of Wanat. In the hours before dawn the COP was overrun by Taliban fighters. Deafening blasts of artillery fire seemed to come from everywhere. But there were nine men manning an outlook on a hill above the COP, outgunned and outmanned. In the middle of the firefight 1LT David Brostrom recognized that his men were going to die. He crawled up to the outpost and with the help of another Soldier set up a machine gun, but before he could fire a round he was killed. He could not rescue the men in the outlook as much as he wanted to and as hard as he tried – he could not save any of them. In those loud and terrifying minutes he had chosen to leave a place of relative safety, braving intense fire, and had run to point of greatest danger to help his men. <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2011/12/battle-of-wanat-201112>

Why do people do such things? A Soldier does it out of a loyalty so consuming that it entirely crowds out consideration of self. Jesus also left the safety of heaven to come down to earth and entered the place were the fighting was the fiercest. And Jesus laid down his life. Jesus did such a thing out of his great love for you and me. He knew that certain death and judgment were waiting for us. While 1LT Brostrom’s efforts were selfless and sacrificing, only Jesus can save us from death and judgment, and he has.

The writer to the Hebrews said, “**Jesus was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people**.” (vs28) In the Old Testament the LORD directed his people Israel to observe the festival of the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest slaughtered an animal, for his own sins and the sins of the people. He collected that blood in a bowl. Then the high priest walked into the temple and into the Holy Place. Then he stood before the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, the innermost room of the temple. As the high priest walked through that curtain he had to sprinkle the blood from that bowl ahead of him. In the Most Holy Place sat the ark of the covenant. This was the very presence of God Almighty. And God said that no sinner could stand before a holy God without sacrifice for sins.

None of those thousands of sacrifices ever forgave the sins of the people of Israel or the high priest. God was teaching the people that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Someone must take the place of others to spare you from death. We cannot stand before God empty handed. This Day of Atonement was a picture of what the promised Messiah would do.

The author describes that action in vs24-26. The high priest had to enter most holy place. Jesus, by his sacrifice on the cross, was the great high priest. He entered the Most Holy Place, too. But he did not walk into the temple. He walked into heaven itself, into the very presence of God the Father, and offered to him his blood. Not only was the high priest, he was the sacrifice. He stood before the Father’s throne and said, “Because I love them, I have sacrificed myself for them. I offer you my precious blood. It is without sin, it is innocent, it is holy and pure, it is enough for them.” This is certain – Jesus sacrificed himself for you. And this is also certain – the Father accepted Jesus’ payment on your behalf.

When Jesus died the Father sat in his courtroom and slammed down the gavel and said, “I declare you ‘not guilty’ of your sins because of my Son’s sacrifice for you.” Through faith in Christ Jesus, the Father has justified you. Through faith in Christ, you now stand before the Judge acquitted. Even if someone were to say, “But what about that time you didn’t trust God, like last week with the election?” God says, “Not guilty.” “But what about that time you did not love your neighbor as much as you love yourself?” “God says, “Not guilty.” The blood of Christ is the payment for sins. Jesus took your guilt on himself. He sacrificed himself for you so that you are free to go!

What joy in a courtroom for the accused to be declared ‘innocent’! As the prophet Malachi described in our First Lesson this morning, “Like newborn calves released from the stall, you will jump for joy!” All this evidence was stacked against us, but Christ took it on himself. This is certain: Christ has sacrificed himself for you. Which brings us to the final thing that is certain.

World War I – known at the time as “The Great War” - was regarded as the end of “the war to end all wars.” Jesus said that war is inevitable, until he comes again. There’s the key, until he comes again. Vs28 “**Christ will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**” This is certain: Christ will bring salvation for you and me. When Jesus comes again to judge the world, he will declare total armistice. He will end all war. There will be no more war veterans. He will bring perfect peace for his Soldiers – you and me. When he comes again some of us may be in the grave. Christ will bring salvation for us – he will raise us out of our graves and make our bodies new again and reunite them with our soul. Christ will bring salvation for us – he will save us from hell and Satan himself.

We look forward to the day of Christ’s return, because there is no uncertainty for us who by God’s grace believe that the blood of Christ was offered to the Father in his courtroom for you and me. You and I know that we stand before the Judge’s throne acquitted. And he will usher me into his heavenly kingdom, where I will live in perfect peace with him and all the believers.

From now on until that day, we will not be heard saying, “I hope I’m going to heaven.” But rather, “I know where I am going because Christ has gone before me and has made certain the way for me – faith in him alone.”

It has been said that two things in life are certain, death and taxes. They got one right. Our Savior tells us that things are certain – death and judgment. But these things are also certain – Jesus’ sacrifice and salvation for me. Let us look forward to his coming with great joy and anticipation! To that end we pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen!”