

Sunday December 11th 2011 – UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Beloved in the Lord,

The hour has come for us to wake up out of sleep. The hour has come for us to be serious about our faith.

Hymn writer Janis Ermanis writes (My rough translation)

Christians the time has come to awake, and to mobilise for the fight. Do not be lukewarm any longer. Lift up your eyes all-round, and sin and evil will tell you that many are likened to the dead. Come hither love, and breathe new life into them, that they may arise, and praise may resound in their souls, in those who bear the image of God.

It is vital, that Christians all around the globe wake up from sleep. Many are napping in the warm glow of God's love and grace, while the foundations of their faith and their Churches are slowly but surely being washed away.

Erosion is a slow process, that is not often detected until significant damage has been done. It does not usually occur overnight, but over a long period of time. When discovered it is often too late.

The Christian Church has suffered and is suffering greatly from erosion. Slowly it has backed away from its foundational truths and become more worldly in its teaching and lifestyle.

We are celebrating Advent. Advent marks the beginning of a new Church year. As we start a new year let us not give into erosion, but let us commit ourselves to stand firm and true on our faith.

Let us stand firm on the Truth that Jesus Christ is the Way, The Truth and The Life, and that there is no other way to God the Father, but by Him.

Churches that have backed away from this truth, have drifted away from God, and they have or soon will collapse.

Why does this happen? I believe it is because many ministers want to be popular. They try to please people. They do not want to create waves.

Post- Modern man no longer understands that we are created in God's image, and that we are accountable to Him. Post modern thinking tries to recreate God in man's image, according to mans standards, likes and desires. That is why the world is in such a mess today.

The candles on the Advent wreath invite us to wake up, and let our light shine in a dark world. To bring hope to those who have no hope. To sow the seeds of love, God's love, wherever we are and wherever we go.

In order for our light to so shine, we must be serious about our faith.

Jesus paid a tremendous, but awful price to save us from darkness, from eternal death – hell. He not only had to shed His Holy and Innocent Blood, but He had to take upon Himself the sin of all mankind and suffer the wrath of God, the punishment for all sin.

He did this on Good Friday, motivated by His great love for us.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” John 3:16-17

Only the blood of Jesus can and did pay the wages of sin. If they had been or ever would be any other way God would have taken it, He would not have made His Son suffer. The fact of the matter is that there was, is and never will be another way. Only the Blood of Jesus can pay for sin. It brings salvation to all who believe in Him. That is why our Church founder Martin Luther preached Sola Christus – Christ Alone. Let us hold fast to this teaching, to this confession.

It is vital that we understand the times in which we are living. We are living in an age of compromise. Compromise trumps truth in many circles.

There is a mounting pressure on pastors and Churches to back away from solid foundational truths and to be accepting of all. A good example is the pressure to accept same sex marriage. There are Churches that have accepted this abomination. God looks from Heaven and weeps.

What we need is a dose of the Spirit that Luther had. “Here I stand, I can do other!” He stood on the Word of God and that alone.

When Jesus was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, he didn't enter into discussions with Satan, He simply said: “It is written.” This is how we must respond to this age in which we live: “It is written!” God said it, I believe it and that settles it!

The greater the cloud of misunderstanding and ignorance that surrounds us the more important it is that our light shines brightly.

This will be the case if we cling to Christ Jesus alone. This will be the case if we stand on His Word alone. This will be the case if we are awake to ourselves, and also look out for one another.

In the letter to the Hebrews we are admonished:

“²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

We are being admonished to hold fast our confession. We can only do this if we hold fast to Jesus Christ, and His Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Word of God are faithful. Let us be clear about that.

Philosophies and philosophers come and go; preachers and teachers come and go; gurus come and go; but the Word of God abides forever! It does not change. It is immutable. Jesus does not change. He is immutable. Again in Hebrews we read this beautiful truth: ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Hebrews 13:8***

Only in Him do we have security here and in eternity. Only in Him do we have hope here and in eternity. Only in Him do we have peace here and in eternity. Only in Him do we have real love here and in eternity.

We are also encouraged to consider one another. Not for the purpose of gossiping, but for stimulating to love and good deeds. That is why we have a congregation. We come together as Christ’s body to worship Him, but also to encourage and to strengthen each other. So often we do not see ourselves very well, and so it is good when someone gives us a prod, a word of encouragement, a gentle rebuke, a wakeup call. Where this is done in love, there a congregation is strong. The light can shine brightly and clearly. May we be such a congregation!

We are also admonished not to forsake the assembling together, as is the habit of some. This means that we should not be missing from Church services on a regular, habitual basis. Obviously there are times when we cannot attend but they should be the exception, not the rule.

Especially in view of the present times. We live in a time when godlessness is on the increase. People are increasingly evil and violent, disobedient and disrespectful. Paul called these difficult or fierce times.

We need to be strong in order to strengthen one another. In this new Church year, let us commit ourselves to be hot in our faith and commitment and not cold or lukewarm.

Let us commit to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, knowing that all else will be added unto us.

Let us pray that God would take us by the hand and lead us. That He would teach us His way, and may we walk His way to the end, to His glory. I close today with the words of M.Fetler: (Again a rough translation)

Father in Heaven, we pray, Give us strength to stand and withstand. We do not pray for easy days, but help us to endure.

Whether the path be bright, or overshadowed in darkness; Sunny days, or stormy winds. Help us in every moment of life, to Hold Your presence dear.

Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.