

Holy and righteous God, in mercy You became the Son of Man to be a gracious Judge to us. Grant us to live our life here on earth in true faith and love, and to stand with all Your people at Your right hand on the Day of Your glory. Amen. (The Book of Family Prayer, N. J. Laache, p. 35)

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead." *Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.*

In Christ Jesus, our beloved Friend and Brother in the flesh, who will warmly welcome us home to heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

Occasionally you and I get a glimpse of a courtroom judge who speaks his sentence upon a criminal with harsh, stern, unmerciful words of condemnation while being protected by armed guards, seated behind a foreboding tall desk. We shudder to hear those words. We shudder even if from what we know about the case we agree the sentence is just. We shudder because we can so easily put ourselves into that place of rightful condemnation.

Our judgment is fast approaching my fellow sinners and such words from Scripture can seize our hearts with fear: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." But instead we hear those welcoming words of our Judge as He places us and all believers on His right hand: "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, receive the inheritance prepared for you since the foundation of the world." Far from that angry unmerciful black robed judge: **Our Living Brother in the Flesh Will Return to Judge in Mercy.**

I

What did Judas picture when he thought of Jesus as his judge when he fitted himself with that rope of self execution? He had heard Jesus use that endearing term for him in the garden: *"Friend"*, but he also heard his sin exposed when Jesus said: "Friend, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" The merciful words were *Friend* and *Son of Man*, but his betrayal was marked by his hypocritical kiss.

Jesus would go on to the cross being charged with these vile sins of His betrayal and would pay for them in full. But the noose tightened with unbelief in Judas' heart, not trusting the all merciful Son of Man, until the breath of life no longer entered the betrayer's lungs. Now, as the son of perdition, he will be gathered to Jesus' left

to hear those devastating words of condemnation: “Depart from me you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

What human judge has you frightened these days? Is it a judge who can send you to the principal’s office? – a judge who can send you out of sight by banishing you to your room? – a judge who in a supervisory role can send you to the boss? – a judge who can place cuffs on you and put you behind bars? – a judge who can isolate you clueless with the silent treatment? The human touch in all these cases does little to mitigate the fear and terror associated with them.

It is right and proper that we, as sinners against the holy God and our neighbors, whom He has created, would feel the terrors of conscience. As we read in our text: “He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world.” We are called upon by our Lord to repent of all our sins, those that haunt our consciences, those pointed out to us by others, and those never remembered. We are so thoroughly sinful, we cannot keep track of them all. But as penitent sinners, like David, we pray to our merciful Lord, forgive even our hidden faults.

But sorrow alone is insufficient. Judas had sorrow over what he had done, but it was not a godly sorrow. It was a sorrow that led him down the path of everlasting despair. Woe to us who trifle with sin and its impending judgment.

II

Why are you not seized with fear knowing and believing that God’s Son is coming to judge your every sin of thought, word and deed? Your sin is no less grievous before the holy God than was Judas’. You sit there calmly, peacefully, maybe nodding off or daydreaming. Would you not expect that we would have sinners like you having heard about the impending judgment jumping up, running out of here, screaming with fear in your voices?

Peter who had fallen into unbelief through his threefold denial wept bitterly when he saw the look of his merciful Savior and remembered Jesus’ many warnings and how he was told that when he was converted again to go and strengthen his brothers in the faith. That was sorrow too, but godly sorrow. My fellow redeemed, God has graciously worked such godly sorrow with repentance and faith into your hearts. With this blessed gift you are now eagerly awaiting Jesus’ return for judgment.

Yes, God “has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness” but “by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.” Who is

this Man? – none other than your Brother in the flesh, Christ Jesus, the Son of God. He is the One who was sacrificed by the heavenly Father for your and my sins upon the cross unto death, but accepted the everlasting payment by raising Him from the dead.

Your living Brother in the Flesh, who defeated your sin, death and hell is coming back; yes, to judge, but also to welcome you into those eternal heavenly mansions which He has lovingly prepared for you and all those who trust in Him alone for salvation. How blessed you are that the Word of salvation is declared repeatedly to you. You regularly get to receive the holy Sacrament in which your Lord graciously and literally places within you the payment for your forgiveness, His true body given and true blood shed. With these gifts you are granted everlasting life and eternal salvation.

Thoughts similar to Judas' enter your mind and hearts at times to be sure, but our Lord approaches you most intimately even kissing you as your brother in the flesh as His holy body and blood touch your lips in real time. Judas was searching for that intimate word of mercy and forgiveness when he returned to the chief priests and elders with their thirty pieces of blood money. But they refused to speak it to him. Our Lord had called these men to their offices to speak that sweet merciful message of His love and forgiveness, but steeped in their own self-righteous unbelief they told Judas to take care of it himself. A sinner in the throes of despair cannot find solace by forgiving him/herself. We cannot do it even in our good days of peace.

Your living Brother in the flesh will return to judge you in mercy. It will not be a fearful experience for you. Look for it with joyful anticipation. We practice for this day every week as we gather together here receiving forgiveness, life and salvation, just as our merciful Lord desires for us to receive. Continue to kiss Christ's dishonor and to embrace His cross in this life with faith in the salvation He alone has secured for you and all sinners. Godly sorrow will fill your hearts with joy and confidence that you will awaken on that great *gettin'-up-mornin'* to those sweet words: "Come, you who are blessed by My Father receive the inheritance prepared for you!" Amen.