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Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come!

On this last Sunday of the Church Year, our text is recorded in the last book of the Bible, the last chapter, the second to the last verse--Revelation 22:20.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Lord God, sanctify us through your truth; your word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow believers, waiting for Christ's glorious return,

What a strange ending our Bible has. One might argue that it is no ending at all; our Bible is not finished; the account is not complete. We know that the Bible is complete. Only two verses before the verse we just read, John, through inspiration, says, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." But the last words of our Bible do not direct our attention back, to a quiet reflection upon the past, but rather ahead, to an eager expectation of the future.

This is by no means a new concept. God has directed his people on earth to look ahead to the future ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin. God very quickly promised the Savior. In essence God said, "Yes, I am coming soon." These words summarize the whole Old Testament, and we have the examples of a Noah, an Abraham, an Isaac, a Jacob, a David, a Job, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, and so forth, who eagerly looked forward to the coming Savior, and prayed, "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus."

In the Gospels we hear how God kept his promise to his Old Testament people. Jesus did come. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; lived on this earth for about 33 years. He died on the cross, winning our salvation for us. He rose again, and then he ascended into heaven. But that was not the end. Recall what the angels told the disciples at Jesus' ascension, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

We know what the disciples were thinking: "When, when will he come again?" We don't know. God knows. Of that day or hour knows no man: no, not even the angels in heaven, but God alone. So the New Testament, like the Old Testament, ends with a prophecy, a promise from the Lord: "Yes, I am coming soon." And we, like the believers of every age, say with eager expectation: "Come, Lord Jesus." Come! We are ready. Come! We wait eagerly.

If you had guests over to your home on Thanksgiving, you no doubt took some time preparing. You went shopping and bought a turkey, and all the other items for the meal. You cleaned the house and put everything in order. You got up early on Thanksgiving and put that turkey in the oven, made pies, and prepared the rest of the

meal. You dressed up to welcome your guests. Hopefully, when you saw your company drive into the driveway, you were able to say, "We are ready."

We await the coming of one greater. We say, "Come, Lord Jesus." But we don't know when he will come. So it is vital that we be ready, that we be ready always, that we be ready now. Are we ready? If God came right now, would he be happy with you? If he looked at your heart, at your life, everything you ever did, said, or thought; would God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? I don't know about you, but all of a sudden I realize, "I'm not ready." What are we going to say to God when he comes? We have only one thing to say. "Jesus lived a perfect life for me. He died for my sins. He has taken away my guilt. He has won eternal life for me. I am ready, through my Savior."

But sometimes the devil comes and tries to put the crazy idea into our heads that since Jesus has made us ready, then it doesn't really matter what we do. Go ahead and sin. God will forgive you. Why bother to come to church? Why bother to study God's word? Why bother to worship and pray? Why bother to take time for the Lord? You know the Savior, and that's all that really matters. That's good enough. How the devil haunts us with those half-truths. In the explanation to the second article, Luther clearly explains, "Christ has redeemed me...that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

When does this wonderful life that Christ has won for us become our own? When we die? When Judgment Day comes? This blessed life becomes our own when we become a child of God. Already here on earth we serve Christ as a member of his kingdom. If we refuse to live on earth the life of service that Christ has won for us, are we not also rejecting the eternal life that he has won for us in heaven? If we don't want to serve Christ here on earth, then certainly we don't want to go to heaven and serve him there for all eternity! Do we find ourselves saying, "Don't come today, Lord, I want to commit that pet sin of mine one more time, and I don't want you to catch me. I don't have much time for you today, Lord. I'll start serving you tomorrow. Then you can come." With such an attitude, are we ready? Rather let us pray God that he forgive us for our rebellious ways. Let us serve Jesus now--put off our sins, and live today the life that Jesus died to win for us, a life that is not a burden, but a blessing. And one day in heaven, we will experience fully the blessings, the salvation that Jesus has won for us.

Once a man was walking past a mansion. Everything was in top condition. The trees were trimmed to perfection. The flower gardens were blooming and there was not a weed to be seen. The man met a servant hard at work, and the servant told him, "My master left five years ago to visit a far-off country. He told me to take care of the place while he was gone, and I don't know when he'll return." The man said to the servant, "You're working so hard; everything is done and ready; you'd think you were expecting your master home tomorrow." The servant replied, "No, my friend, not tomorrow, I expect him today." May we be that well prepared for the return of our Lord. Be ready each day. Come, Lord Jesus; we are ready.

On Thanksgiving Day, after all the preparations were made, we waited eagerly for our guests to arrive. In the same way, as we are prepared for Jesus' coming day in and day out, we wait eagerly for him. We want him to come. We want him to come soon. It is said that no one wants Judgment Day to come on the day before they get married, or the day before some other joyful event. We don't want to miss the happy times of this life. But heaven is far happier, far greater than the best day we have ever experienced

here on earth. So we wait for the Lord's coming eagerly.

Think how eager the apostle John must have been for the Lord's second coming. He had seen the vision of heaven, the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, a city of pure gold, with every kind of precious stone. John had seen the saints in white robes, standing before their God, singing praises to him. John knew that he had seen only a small reflection of heaven, a place far too wonderful and glorious for our mortal minds to even begin to comprehend. And yet John continued to wait, living day after day in exile, alone on the island of Patmos. How he must have longed for the day when he could go to that beautiful place that God had shown him. John is there now, but we still wait eagerly.

Once in a while I go shopping. I don't like to go shopping. But once in a while my wife has me pick something up for dinner. As I wait in the check-out line, I notice the tabloids and magazines. In general they are worthless; don't waste your money on them. But one thing that is interesting is how many articles there are on the after-life. And there are shows on TV about the after-life. This makes it clear that people are searching for answers about life after death. Tragically, the tabloid articles and TV shows are almost always totally misguided, because they fail to look in the one place where the answers are found, the Bible. We have the comforting truth. And there are so many people with whom we need to share it!

When we wait for something long enough, the temptation is to give up. Just look around and see how many people have given up on the Lord. Think how crazy it must sound to them when we tell them that a day is coming when the trumpets will sound, Jesus will appear, the dead will come to life, time will end, the world will be destroyed, and God will take his own to be with him forever in heaven. There are many who think we're crazy for believing what God says in the Bible. And the most foolish part of all, they say, is that we're wasting our lives waiting for something that will never happen.

There is even a modern play called, "Waiting For Godot." It's a very simple play. People come on the stage and wait. And as they wait, they do crazy things in preparation for Godot's coming. But Godot never comes. It is no accident that the first three letters of Godot spell God. And that is exactly what many people think, that God will never come, and that we his people are wasting our lives doing crazy things as we prepare for and await his return. What a surprise it will be for most people on Judgment Day; what a horrible, terrifying surprise. They will indeed say, "Mountains, fall on us; hills, cover us." But there will be no escape.

On the other hand, we wait eagerly for that day when we will be taken from this wicked world and the troubles all around us to a perfect heaven. We know that Christ will come again. He has promised us, and God keeps his promises. It's like when he came the first time. When Jesus was born, how many people were ready for him? How many people were still waiting? Not very many. But there were some, some who were prepared, some who had eagerly waited, and waited long. Think of aged Simeon and Anna, who were at the temple when Mary and Joseph presented the baby Jesus. Simeon praised God saying, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word: For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The next few weeks, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' first coming, let us be reminded that as sure as he came the first time, he will also come again.

People have a tendency to look ahead. The three-year-old watches the school bus

out the window each morning, looking ahead to the day when she can go to school. The fifteen-year-old looks ahead to the day when he gets his driver's license. The eighteen-year-old looks forward to high school graduation. The twenty-three-year-old looks forward to a wedding day. The forty-five-year-old looks forward to grandchildren. The sixty-four-year-old looks forward to retirement. In a way this is foolish, looking forward, is it not? Are we not wishing our lives away? But as Christians we do have something far more important than anything in this life to look forward to, no matter how young or old we may be--the day when Christ comes, when it will be said of us, "They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Lord, we are ready, through your forgiveness and in your righteousness. We wait eagerly for your salvation. Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."