

“ ___ Shopping Days Until Salvation!”

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

I received an email advertisement from Amazon which said, “Countdown to Black Friday. It’s never too early for a good deal!” Yes, the biggest shopping day of the year, Black Friday, is only 19 days away! And there is only 47 shopping days until Christmas. Now, that sounds like a lot of time, but you and I know what happens this time of the year. First we need to think about Thanksgiving, and then Advent begins with Wednesday Advent services. Schools have special Christmas or holiday programs. Sure, we think we have a whole 47 days of shopping before Christmas, but it will go by quicker than we expect, and there you are, shopping in a packed mall on Christmas Eve stressing out and usually you can’t find what you are looking for.

There is another day coming, and we have only so many days left to shop. I wish I can tell you when it will happen, but I can’t; only God the Father knows. But it will happen as he promised in our text, ***“The end of all things is near.”*** We may have 47 days until it comes, 47 years, or 47 minutes or seconds. And the time will go by quicker than we think. We are busy providing for our families, supplying taxes to the government, fulfilling obligations at work and school, living and sleeping, and it is real easy to put off this day because of all the other things demanding our time.

But the end is nearer than we think. Just as there are 47 days to shop for Christmas, we have only so much time bring gifts to others. Pretty soon our salvation will come and this terrible world will come to an end. Go shopping now and get your gifts.

I. The end is near.

“The end of all things is near.” The end of what? As R.E.M., a rock band from the 80’s puts it, “It’s the end of the world as we know it.” God told us about it in our reading from Malachi: ***“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.”*** Complete destruction is coming. The ashes that will be left is the world as we know, our houses, the nations of the world, man’s achievements, and us! Don’t blame God. In fact, thank him for being patient and giving the world time to listen to his word, believe and be saved. But God is not going to put it off forever. The world is corrupted and it demands to be destroyed.

But there is more. It says in our Hebrews reading: ***“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”*** If only sinful humans would be annihilated on that day. That would not be so bad; but God did not create mankind to live for a short time. He created us to live forever, and after death there is more, a judgment. Our legal system doesn’t arrest someone for a couple days and then release them, thinking that a couple nights in jail is enough. No, they hold them over for trial and the real punishment. Think of the grave as the jail and the trial is yet to come. What is bad is the judge will actually be fair. That is our greatest nightmare, a judge who will fairly apply the law and give us what we deserve. Just ask the rich man who pleaded with Abraham for a drop of water on his tongue in hell.

But not us, not with believers. Again, I will let Malachi speak: ***“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty.”***

Luther Burbank was a famous botanist at the turn of the 19th Century. He changed how we grow things by experimenting with grafting and cross breeding. He left behind for us the Russet Burbank potato which is the primary potato McDonald’s uses for its French Fries. He was interviewed for a magazine where he said, “If I have made any worthy contribution to the world, it is the discovery of the great principle in botany that a plant born a weed does not have to remain a weed.” As proof, he cited what he did to the California beach plum, a plant that produced such terrible plums that not even animals could stand to eat it. He crossed this junk, weed plum with a Japanese plum and produced a fruit that was five times as large and sweet and juicy and good to eat. He turned a weed into something else.

The Lord did that to you. We are by nature weeds, worthless plants that should be pulled and cast into the compost pile or fire. But what was born sinners does not have to remain condemned sinners. The Lord did this through his gift of grace, by sending his son, Jesus Christ to save us. Again, you heard it already in Hebrews: ***“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so 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.”*** Take a moment to absorb those words. Even if you can point out a dozen sins of mine right now, in God’s eyes they do not exist because Christ was sacrificed on the cross for them. He will appear again to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. That’s us. By his grace we will not be the ash after judgment, but leap like calves released from the stall with the ash underneath our feet.

In a sense, God grafted Christ into us so what was born worthless weeds are no longer weeds. Not even death can get in the way: ***“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.”*** The end of all things is near, but not the end of us. Our salvation is almost here.

II. So go and get your gifts now.

This means we have only so many shopping days left before our salvation comes. ***“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”***

Let me tell you about the time I went with our youth to a youth rally in Ottawa Canada many years ago. On the last day of the rally before we came home, I had some Canadian money left over, so I asked a pastor friend if I could treat him to lunch before we left. That only made sense. I couldn’t use that Canadian money back here in St. Peter; it was good only for Canada, so I used it up.

Friends, think of all the gifts the Lord has given you like Canadian money. They are good for now, not later when our salvation comes. When Malachi pictured the world as ash, picture your home and bank account and car and everything as part of that ash. You do not want to take your house into heaven when we have a mansion waiting for us. You don’t want to take any money with you when heaven is pictured as a city with streets like solid gold. All we have is for here, not there, so let’s use it up.

First think of the gift of time and faith and believing in Jesus and the Bible, ***“Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”*** We need to be aware, sober, self-controlled so we don’t veer off the path to heaven. To this end we use our time to pray for ourselves, kids, grandkids, neighbors, the Church, to stay on the narrow road to heaven.

“Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” When my wife and I were coming up with names for our kids, there were certain names we avoided because they reminded us of some misbehaving kids we had in the classroom. We do that all the time, don’t we. Husbands and wives bring up faults from twenty years ago. Isn’t it better to love and cover over all those sins? There is no better gift than to forgive sins so you or I don’t instantly think of bad things when your name is mentioned.

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” It isn’t hospitality if we grumble. Sure, we may be nice and open up our home, but if we can’t wait for the evening to be over, we are not hospitable. It depends on how you look at it. Is the evening for you or them? If it is for you, you selfishly can’t wait to get them out of your house. If it is for them, all you have and do is to make them happy. That’s why God gives us these gifts

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” The Scriptures are clear. God gives each of us different, complimentary gifts. It may be wealth, time or compassion. It could be the ability to listen, to lead, to be generous. We need these things and God gives them to us through others. You are God’s way of keeping his promises to someone else.

“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” I told you about Luther Burbank earlier, and maybe you now appreciate the work he has done in botany. How much more is God praised when we let people know who he really is and what he does for us! We do this when we speak the very words of God. And God will not only be praised, we open heaven to each other.

Wow, we have so much to give. I know I have benefited personally by the gifts others gave me whether my parents and my upbringing, the companionship of my family to the patience, kindness, gentleness and forgiveness you give. You have benefited from such things as well, more than you realize.

After the service you will see a special WELS connection and you will receive a special envelope about a deficit drive for our synod. We will also be asking soon for donations to finish the carpet project in our church. We are constantly asking for volunteers from Sunday school to lawn mowers. You will be asked to help out your grandma or aunt who is ill or recovering from an illness. I sometimes feel bad asking for all sorts of things like these, but one member corrected me. He asked how could we help if we don’t know, and that is exactly the attitude of our text, a desire to share gifts. When we ask, it may not fit the gifts one member has, but it certainly fits the gifts another has from God. That’s why God gives them to us in the first place, to use them to his glory and to serve one another.

There are only so many shopping days left until salvation comes. It’s not too early to start giving. INJ Amen.