

"Today. Now."

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:17

Dear Fellow Christians:

A significant percentage of all that we do in life is directed towards the future. No one here, for example, works to live today. In other words, everyone here today has what they need for today – food, clothing, shelter, etc. What you are working for is future needs – or perceived needs. We save money not for today but for the future. We educate for the future, plan for the future, organize for the future.

What if there were no tomorrow? You've heard the expression many times, I'm sure: *"There IS no tomorrow!"* What if that were literally true? What if somehow God chose to reveal to us that today was our last day – what would you do? You would probably have two answers, one from the old Adam and one from the new man. The old Adam would tell you to run up the credit card bill and party like a rock star. The old Adam is a pig. The new man, on the other hand, would want to stay focused in the Word of God, spend time with loved ones, and especially to reach out to those souls in your circle of life whose feet are not now on the path to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The curious paradox in all of this is that there is *always* a tomorrow and there is *never* a tomorrow. We tend to justify putting off whatever is remotely awkward or unpleasant or difficult by telling ourselves, over and over again, that it will somehow get done tomorrow. That logic, carried forward, will mean that that thing you were trying to get done will *never* get done. There will always be a tomorrow – until there isn't.

In a very real sense then we never really experience tomorrows, do we? Only today's. Only here and now. Since tomorrow never arrives, nothing gets done unless and until we learn to live in the present. Planning obviously has its place, but the real substance – the real results – are not in the planning but in the doing. No leaves are raked by planning; the house is not cleaned, the car is not washed, the groceries are not purchased - by planning. More importantly the Bible is not read, faith is not strengthened, and souls are not reached by planning but by actually doing. The time therefore for such things can't always be tomorrow. It can't even be "later." It has to be now.

We turn then – now – to our text for this morning, which expands on this theme. That text is found recorded in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the Third Chapter. Again, this is 2 Timothy, so hear these words as that which they are – the inspired words of a man who recognized that his time of grace on earth was about to end:

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:5** *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

These are God's Words. That the hearing and study of these words might bring to each of us the blessings our God intends, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."**

It's a common theme in various forms of entertainment, isn't it? Someone finds out he or she doesn't have long to live, and friends and family all pitch in to fulfill as many items as possible on the "bucket list." The general thought centers on milking every last ounce of fun or fulfillment from this present life. That's the world; that's *our* old Adam's natural inclination.

Our text was written by a man with a very different sort of bucket list, and since his words were written by divine inspiration we know for a fact that this is the sort of list that has the stamp of approval of our God. The text is part of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, which means that when Paul wrote it he was near the end of his second Roman imprisonment and was certain that he would soon be martyred for his faith.

The first thing that is immediately apparent is the stark contrast between Paul's "last days on earth" thoughts and the world's. Paul, as we would expect, was all about the life that follows this one. He was therefore all about the only means by which any human being can survive this life and experience the next: God's Word. Take a few moments to reread our text

with this in mind and contrast the difference between the "last-days thoughts" of the godless with those of a true man of God.

Having seen and done so much, Paul comes back to this one, central truth: **"The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."** He then goes on to explain just exactly why the Scriptures are so effective, while they are so good at what they do: **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."** That's sort of the idea behind "the bucket list" isn't it – the idea of completion? Folks want to do this or get that done with the idea that that will somehow make leaving this life more tolerable or acceptable - as if you are only supposed to depart this world once you've done all that you wanted to.

Paul in our text does talk about being complete, but the difference is that his idea of complete and the world's idea are obviously very different. While Paul talks about being **"equipped for every good work,"** the world talks about sky-diving, competing in an ironman competition, or publishing a novel. For the world, it's all an illusion, isn't it? It's this nonsense idea that if you can just write out a list of the things you want to accomplish, and then somehow accomplish those things, then all will be well, all will be complete and you will be ready to depart this world and to then see what is next.

Not even the godless, in their rare moments of stark honesty, really believe that to be true. Not even they believe that getting just a bit more done in this life will make you feel ready to leave this life. More just makes you want more. Fulfill one list of dreams and man can always think of ten more. The fact is there is really only one good thing that comes from the bucket list concept or mentality: the creation of a sense of urgency, and the unmasking of the wispy fraud that is "tomorrow."

Christians need to co-opt this concept from the world, and then apply the philosophy to something a bit more lasting and salutary than riding an elephant or parasailing in the Grand Canyon. The fact is Satan is good with the concept of tomorrow; he has no problem with good intentions. The devil loves "some day." It's living and doing in the here and now that infuriates him and frustrates his plans. He's all for beginning a program of Bible reading, but only if you resolve to start "next week." Family devotions are wonderful, so long as you start them once your hectic life slows down a bit – which it of course never does. You don't really need to actually *go* to Bible Class when it is offered at church; just *intend* to go at some point down the road – when going will undoubtedly feel more right for some reason.

Imagine if Jesus had adopted this "tomorrow mentality." Our salvation would never be won, would it? Thanks be to God that he didn't. At the moment his Father determined that the time was just right, Jesus seized

that moment and took into his divine person our human nature. Born of the Virgin he placed himself under the demands of his own laws, and then every moment of every day thereafter he did always and only what was right for that moment. He didn't just *plan* to meet the woman at the well, putting off the inevitable confrontation with the notion that maybe on a future visit the time would be better to talk to her about both her sin and her Savior. He just did it. Right then. He didn't ingratiate himself with the scribes and Pharisees, first establishing a rapport on which he could later build. He confronted their damning, work-righteous religion at every single opportunity – right then. When faced with the certainty of his death in Jerusalem, he didn't opt for a detour into some of the small surrounding towns or villages – with the rationalization that maybe he could reach a few more souls. He charged headlong into the bayonets of both man and demon and sacrificed his life for our sins. In short, our Lord Jesus secured our salvation by denying himself the temptation of tomorrow by grasping today.

By the grace of God, you and I know not only that Jesus is our Savior, we also know that the *"put off till tomorrow"* mentality is a fraud. Life presents an unending succession of examples in our secular lives that illustrate the folly of the tomorrow mentality, doesn't it? See if any of this sounds familiar: *"Any day now I'm going to start taking my baby for walks in the stroller"* - until suddenly your baby is walking and wants nothing to do with the stroller. *"There's plenty of time to take the kids camping or fishing"* – until suddenly they have a world outside of yours, or those same kids move off to college, and you're left wondering what happened to all of those endless tomorrows. *"I'm absolutely going to reach out to that friend that has drifted away and is facing such trials in her life"* - until one day you hear the tragic news of her passing. One after another the items on the list of tomorrow's plans reach and pass their expiration dates. And then they are just gone, forever.

With some things it's no great tragedy. With others it absolutely is. This is nowhere as important as in things spiritual. An infant that wasn't pushed around in a stroller for an hour or so each day can certainly develop normally and join his or her Lord in eternity. On the other hand, a child that was not brought up with a solid foundation in the Word of God very likely will not. As an adult, it will matter very little on Judgment Day whether or not you completed some sort of secular bucket list during your time of grace on earth. It will matter greatly if you fed your soul regularly with the bread of life and thereby survived this world. You really won't care on the Last Day if you were brave enough to bungee-jump off of a 200 foot railroad trestle or ride a bull named Fu Man Chu. It will matter a great deal if you shared your knowledge of the path to heaven with your friends and neighbors.

Again, the devil strongly encourages you to do all of those good, salutary, God-pleasing things that you fully intend to do. Tomorrow. Now is the time. "Always tomorrow" means never.

Speaking of "now is the time," Paul in our text spoke of a "someday," didn't he? ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** That's one tomorrow that has come, hasn't it? Surely Paul's prophecy has become a reality in our own day, for we see this very thing everywhere we turn.

Paul in our text puts the whole concept of "TODAY" into the proper setting with these words: ***"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom..."*** This is the setting or background, isn't it? This is the perspective, the vantage point from which we are to view our actions in the present – the imminent, any-moment-now return of our Lord Jesus and the end of all created things. Great discipline, as well as great spiritual wisdom and insight, are required if we are to live each moment as both our God and that new man in us long to live. And how did Paul sum up our great, all-encompassing, core mission in life? What was that key "one thing" we want to make sure doesn't get crowded out by the false promise of tomorrow? ***"Preach the word!"***

"No offense," you say, "but I thought that was your job, Pastor. You're the preacher, after all."

Just in case anyone here really believes that preaching the word is the pastor's job, rather than the high calling of every single Christian, be reminded that the only difference between you and your pastor is that he is called to preach the Word and administer the sacraments *publicly*. In their individual lives, *every single child of God is a priest before God*. The Lord's Great Commission to ***"Go and make disciples of all the nations"*** was given to individuals. That obviously includes, but is not limited to, pastors.

Our God calls to you from the pages of his holy Word to see through the devil's plan for "always tomorrow" and to recognize that today – right now – is the time. You don't even need to set your priorities, since God has already done that for you. Drive then from your thought process the crippling nonsense of someday and replace it with today – now. Now we start devotions. Now we make church our priority. Now we have that conversation with the unbelieving friend. Now I confront my loved one with his on-going sin. Not tomorrow. Today. Now.

Because that's what my Lord wants, and he is due back at any moment. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 32:22-32** The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

^{ESV} **Luke 18:1-8** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Angela Pfennig

The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost – October 16, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 779 (Brown Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 32:22-32) Our two Scripture readings teach us something about prayer – specifically God-pleasing persistence in prayer. Our first lesson is the account of Jacob wrestling with what most believe to be the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus (although our reading here refers to him as "a man.") The point is that God here commends those who are persistent in their prayers.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Supplement page 26) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Luke 18:1-8) As noted above, both of our readings center on persistence in prayer. Note here how Jesus not only does not condemn persistence, he encourages it. Human beings often have difficulty with this concept. Why, for example, does God at times want us to ask repeatedly for the same thing before he grants our prayer? The point is we are not required to understand God's reasons for the things he does; we are to believe what he tells us – and act accordingly.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 609 (Red Hymnal)

"Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (Printed on the back page)

"Today. Now."

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 611 (Verses 1, 5-7) (Red Hymnal)

"The Day Is Surely Drawing Near"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn - 49 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty God Thy Word Is Cast"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (38) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship meal
	-12:30 p.m.	– Organ concert/demonstration
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Pastor Paul Tiefel has returned the call to Grand Rapids.

That congregation has now called Pastor David Baker of Red Wing. Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Faith of Markesan, WI.

Organ Dedication – This morning we dedicate our new church organ. As part of our celebration we have also planned a fellowship meal and an organ concert to follow. Even if you are just visiting this morning, please join us also for the meal and the concert.

Christmas Flowers – The sign-up sheet for ordering Christmas flowers in on the mailbox table. The deadline is October 30. Please see Eileen if you have any questions.

Mission Helper Trip – Plans are underway for a Mission Helper Trip to Nepal in the summer of 2017. More information is available at www.MHT.LutheranMissions.org.

ILC Visitors' Day – ILC Visitors' Day is scheduled for Friday, November 11 on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, WI. Activities include visiting classes, touring the campus, and attending the fall musical. Even if you are not considering entering the preaching or teaching ministries, ILC also offers a high quality two-year AA degree, and most credits transfer to other colleges and universities. More information is available from the Pastor.