

Here Is the Christ!
Matthew 24:15-28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christ warns about false Christ's and false prophets arising in our Gospel lesson. These false Christs and false prophets will arise inside the church, not outside. Many believe that they are revealing great truths about God to the church. Today, there are many who think they have discovered something new about Christ for this 21st Century. Satan has duped them, and what they are teaching is surprising and scary.

"One cannot pray to Jesus," "[To pray to Jesus] is a gross heresy – Jesus only points back to God." At least, that is what Professor Harry Kuitert declared in his book Jesus, the Inheritance of Christianity. He is retired professor from the Free University of Amsterdam and a retired minister of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN) "Jesus supported the Jewish view of God, so he never saw himself as God-on-earth. He is not a Second God, nor the Second Person of the Holy Trinity," he declared. Dr Kuitert said it was not correct to see Jesus as God on earth, "Jesus was a Jew, a follower of the Jewish faith and not God himself."

What's that got to do with Christianity here in the Embarrass and Pella Opening? Well, I found his writing without even looking hard. The internet and TV have made the whole world global community.

At the beginning of the month, I picked up Tim at Concordia and we stopped to pick up a few things for our fishing weekend. As we were looking around, the clerk noticed my clerical collar and asked what kind of Christian pastor I was. I told him I was a Lutheran pastor. He asked, "What kind of Lutheran?" "Oh good, you are one of those who believe in something." Tim was surprised to hear why the man, a Lutheran, had left his ELCA congregation, let us just say that the final straw was the Easter sermon where the pastor declared that Jesus was just a man, that he had not risen from the dead, and there is no heaven nor any physical resurrection on last day. To say that Tim was appalled would be an understatement. He asked me later, "If you do not believe Jesus is God, and do not believe in the resurrection, what's the point?" I think you would all agree!

How could a pastor in a church that bears the name Lutheran believe and teach such a thing? Let me quote from a textbook used to teach doctrine at certain ELCA Lutheran Seminaries to Lutheran pastors. It says, "The story of Christ in the Gospels is a mixture of historical event and mythological symbols. The purpose of the myth is to interpret the significance of the events... Myth and its symbols are indispensable to express the reality of God in the person of Jesus. Myth is an appropriate form of language for expressing the events and meanings of God's revelation in history. We must look at New Testament interpretation of the myth as story, without taking its symbolic elements literally but also without eliminating its historical aspects." (Carl E. Braaten, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols. - 1:71)

I don't know about you, but if I were to go to their Christ, I do not know who I would be going to. Their Christ is myth and history, and they are not sure which is which. If I follow Dr. Kuitert, Christ isn't God at all. And if I go to the clerk's old church, there is no hope and no true reason for

our existence.

Beloved of God, where is the Christ? From these examples, it is clear that false Christs and false prophets have already arisen. They are not simply “in the world,” but in the church. Where else would they arise? Does paganism need a false Christ? Would they even listen? Satan already has everybody outside the pale of Christianity in his grips – they are eternally lost even without a false Christ.

Consider this, to whom would a false Christ appeal? Only those in the church that bears the name of Christ are interested hearing or learning more about Christ.

False Christs and false prophets are appealing because we are pressured to buy into worldly thinking. And then comes someone claiming to teach in the name of Jesus, and their teaching sounds loving, and it fits into the world’s model of thinking – and so it is appealing. They also claim that thousands follow them, something they bandy about as further evidence of their truth.

But we must also consider Paul’s popularity, the first and great missionary. How many times was He chased out of cities, or stoned, or beaten? God's truth isn't appealing, it is contradictory to most worldly thinking. Scripture reminds us, God's elect are the few, not the many. Masses follow the false Christs. Satan makes his appeal to those in the church through those who claim that same name of Christ.

Jesus warns in our Gospel lesson, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (vv. 23-24)

My friends, where is the Christ? The Christ, the Messiah, invites you to come to Him. He says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28- 30) But, where shall you find Him?

The Christ has already shown us where He will be. He states that He seeks and saves the lost. **He** comes **to us**. He comes to us as the Word. Wherever the name of Christ is, as **He** has given it to be, there He is.

Where is The Christ? He comes to you today! No, not some ethereal presence, but really and truly present. Christ, who we confess as Very God of Very God, the Word made flesh and dwelt among us, who died for your sins and rose three days later, is the One who comes to give you the gifts He purchased on the cross with His innocent suffering and death, sealing them when He rose again on the third day. He comes and gives the forgiveness of your sins, eternal life, and salvation.

Where His Word goes forth, there is He present. He gathers us here, in His name – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. He speaks by the mouths of His undershepherds and thereby forgives sins. He is the Word that is preached. His Spirit is present building faith in those who hear His Word. His physical body and blood are present in the Sacrament of the Altar. He speaks and He blesses in the Words we call the benediction.

There is a reason that our liturgy uses Simeon's words after he had held the baby Jesus in his arms, as our post-communion canticle called the Nunc Dimittis; "Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and Thy people Israel."

Dear friends, Simeon had it right. He had held the Christ! He had touched and seen God's salvation. In the Sacrament of the Altar, you too have seen and touched and eaten of your salvation. The Christ comes to you and gives you of Himself. In His Word and His meal, Christ gives you of Himself, salvation is yours today in Him.

Unlike so many who will not recognize Him, you have been blessed with eyes opened by His Spirit to recognize Him. Satan would like to deceive the elect through false christs and false prophets. False christs and false prophets are appealing they teach doctrines that are very appealing to our sinful flesh – they may even perform marvelous seeming signs. But, the elect will not be deceived.

Does our Lord do things in spectacular ways? Does He accompany His deeds with pomp and circumstance? When the King of kings was born, His birth was not heralded with trumpet fanfare at any palace, He was not displayed wrapped in silk, satin, and gold. He was born in stable, wrapped in strips of cloth, laid in a feeding trough for domesticated animals, and his first visitors were dirty shepherds.

How did this King win victory over your enemies? Was He in a gold gilded chariot wearing a crown encrusted with rare jewels, at the head of a massive army, riding out to the cheers of roaring crowds? No, He was crowned with thorns, beaten, whipped, stripped naked, and nailed to a cross. His death defeated sin, death, and Satan.

You, the elect come into God's house and find Christ where He has promised to come to you. No, it is not anything spectacular.

He comes in simple water - we call it baptism.

He comes in simple words - we call them Holy Absolution.

He comes in simple words - we call it the sermon.

He comes in bread and wine - we call it the Sacrament of the Altar.

He comes wherever His Word is spoken, for He is that living Word.

We are to be prepared for the final coming of Christ. When will it be? Back to the Future acted as if 2015 would never arrive, yet here it is. The Cubs did not win the World Series, Jirschle and the Royals did – and now it is history. However, The Christ has promised to be where He comes to His people. He has promised that He will prepare His elect for His return. Today, he fulfills that promise. Today, you are prepared by Christ for His return. He feeds and nourishes your faith, so that you are prepared for that last day. Rejoice in Christ, and be confident in His return, for He has made you ready. Amen.