

November 2024

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter

From the Mission Department

As we experience the transitions from Autumn into the Winter season, we are also nearing the end of the Church year. November 24th is the final Sunday of the Church Year, Judgement Sunday, with the theme of Christ, the Lord of the Universe. The Epistle Postil article included with this issue will focus on this theme. John was shown marvelous events on Patmos where he records for us how he saw the events of the last judgement where Christ sat upon His great white throne, opened the Book of Life and judged every man.

This year we have been in the third year of the three-year cycle. The new church year will begin with First Advent Sunday on December 1st. The 2025 Lectionary is available on the Ministers Resources webpage for reference or download.

We continue to see how God has called additional workers in His congregations throughout North America. May each of us be given a heart to serve faithfully with the gifts that have been given. It is good that we visit openly and support one another; through this fellowship we are encouraged to continue in this calling and share the joy of believing and the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ.

This is the last issue of Ministers Message for 2024. The pane on the left side of this page contains a list of noteworthy events for 2025. Please review and mark relevant events in your calendar. Next year's editions of Ministers Message will continue the *Epistle Postil* articles and the *Jesus Converses* series which will conclude in the May edition. Please let us know if you have suggestions for items you would like us to cover in future editions.

We wish you all a blessed and joyful Advent and Christmas.

Noteworthy

Upcoming Events

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #1
February 6, 2025
8:00 pm CST

LLC New Ministers Workshop
February 21–22, 2025

LLC 2025 Phoenix Winter Services
March 13–16, 2025

LLC Ministers Camp, SLC
April 4–6, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #2
May 29, 2025
8:00 pm CDT

LLC 2025 Outlook Summer Services
July 3–6, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #3
August 28, 2025
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Ministers & Wives Camp
Prairie Shores
September 19–21, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #4
November 6, 2025
8:00 pm CST

Jesus and Thomas

Leo Väyrynen

John 20:26–29

It has been said that Finns do not believe until they see and try something. Such an approach is not necessarily a bad thing. Nowadays we are offered many and varied beliefs and truths. Wholesome criticalness is necessary. The Bible also encourages us to test all things and keep that which is good. The disciple Thomas brings to mind such present-day people who doubt matters of faith. He has difficulty believing that which cannot be proved by seeing, hearing, or touching. Thomas has received the honor of beginning the Christmas season. It is said that “good Thomas brings Christmas” on his name day December 21st, and that “bad Canute takes it away.”

Thomas did not stand out among Jesus’ disciples. It is telling that of the evangelists only John mentions him. When Jesus received news of Lazarus’ illness and decided to go to see him, the disciples reminded Him of the dangers of the journey. The Jews had in fact decided to stone Jesus to death. When Jesus wasn’t concerned about the warning, Thomas blurted out as if without hope: “Let us also go, that we may die with him!” Another time that Thomas is mentioned was in connection with when Jesus said that He was going to His Father’s home to prepare a place for His own. Jesus said, “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Thomas had a question ready immediately. “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Jesus replied, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”



ARTWORK: RAIMO ÖSTERBERG

JESUS CONVERSES

Jesus met many people during His life. Several of them wanted to converse with Him. Jesus’ teaching gave birth to questions in some listeners. They wanted to hear more since His teachings deviated from the teachings of the scribes of that time. Several people approached Jesus because of their difficulties and problems. Jesus also used to talk on His own initiative with people He encountered in various situations.

Several discussions which Jesus had with various people are recorded in the Bible. This year we will publish a series of writings in this paper by Leo Väyrynen on some of these discussions. Although around two thousand years have passed since these discussions, their topics and issues are still timely. We notice this in this series of writings.

The most familiar is the narrative of Doubting Thomas who did not believe Jesus’ resurrection until he had seen His wounds. It is exactly of this incident that our text relates.

It is telling to note that among Jesus’ disciples, there was a place for the heavy-minded and slow-moving Thomas. When leaving on the way of suffering, Thomas feared the worst. He did not understand where Jesus was going and what the disciples should do. The most arresting thing is that Thomas doubted Jesus’ resurrection, which is the foundational pillar of Christian faith.

Upon rising from the dead, on the same day, Jesus appeared before his frightened disciples behind locked doors saying, “Peace be unto you!” Then Jesus showed the wounds in His hands and side as proof of His identity and gave a precious task to His disciples. He said, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” Having said this Jesus breathed upon them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Thomas was not there when Jesus came. When his companions in their joy related that they had seen the Lord, Thomas said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Jesus did not turn His back onto the doubter, but He loved him.

Jesus Converses

Even yet Jesus does not reject a questioning and doubting Christian. When Jesus appeared again a week later, He not only showed Thomas His hands and feet, but encouraged him to thrust his fingers into his wounds and said, “And be not faithless, but believing.” Thomas did not need to touch the wounds, seeing sufficed. He burst out saying, “My Lord and my God.”

Thus, Thomas was able to believe in the resurrection and rejoice of God’s grace. It is telling that precisely Thomas, of whom three of the evangelists had nothing to say, was the first to fully realize Jesus’ divinity and understand that the question is not intellectual acceptance of His divinity, but of personal saving faith, which the Holy Spirit can beget in a person. There is more to the reality of God than that which is within reach of the senses. Assurance of it does not come from a belief of truth proceeding from man, rather it comes from an assurance of faith affected in us by the Holy Spirit.

Although Thomas gave a good testimony, Jesus still had something to tell him, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” Here is the climax of our text as far as we are concerned. With these words Jesus speaks to all of those who are not able to see Him with their natural

eyes. Easter faith must get along without natural sight, only then is it true faith. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). We who have come into faith later are not in a weaker position than the disciples, for God is not unjust. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

The message of Christmas also opens only to faith of the heart. For the obtaining of this faith, Jesus established His congregation and placed in it the office of the Holy Spirit’s preaching. A person who hearing the sermon of reconciliation believes his sins forgiven is able to see Jesus’ wounds with eyes of faith and to testify: “My Lord and my God!” Jesus does not show His wounds to those on the outside of His congregation. Lars Levi Laestadius correctly stated in his time, “I think, Thomas, that you must first come into the group of Christians, before Jesus comes to show His wounds. There is no way to become a partaker of the grace of the resurrection until you come into the congregation. No matter how much you would read the book alone and pray at home, you will not become a Christian there. But come first into Christ’s gathering and seek first the congregation, then you will find Christ.”

Epistle Postil

Judgement Sunday

Veijo Sydänmetsä

CHRIST, THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE

Christ the King Sunday is another name used for Judgement Sunday. These two different themes form a whole. Thus, the last Sunday of the church year is joined with the following Sunday, Advent. At the beginning and end of the church year, or at the end and the beginning, the same message is heard: God approaches us in Christ and sets us before His face.

However, the perspective of Advent and Judgement Sunday is quite different. The Lord of Advent arrives humbly riding an ass, while Christ of Judgement Sunday arrives

in His power and glory with His holy angels. The Lord of Advent arrives as a redeemer for all people, while the Lord of Judgement Sunday arrives to gather only His own.

The Day of the Lord separates people into two groups. Some rise to live in the resurrection, others to the resurrection of judgement. In the last judgement, God’s righteousness will be realized once and for all.

The day’s epistle texts relate of the last judgement, which is just and to which all must one day come. They encourage people to find the merciful God in His kingdom already in this time and thus move from the slavery of the law to the freedom of the gospel.

Epistle Postil

LECTIONARY YEAR 3

Revelations 20:11–21:1

THE LAST JUDGEMENT

According to the Bible, a person must one day account for their deeds, to take responsibility for their deeds. All people will be gathered for the last judgement. Biblical revelation concerning this judgement wants to tell a person to seek a merciful God in this time. It will not be possible anymore beyond the border of time.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

John was shown marvelous events on Patmos. He saw the throne and He that sat on it, as well as all the dead who stood before the throne. In a Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead: The Lord, himself, will step down from heaven in His power. Those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then those that are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the wind and clouds. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

The resurrection of the dead connected with the second coming of Christ is a completely incomprehensible event. How can a person who has once died and decayed wake up to life? However, the Bible in this regard is consistently unconditional. It leaves no place for doubt. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28–29).

THE BOOKS ARE OPENED

The Book of Life has received its name from the ancient practice of keeping genealogical lists of nations. Metaphorically it shows God’s care for His own. He has written the names of all His children in a book—the Book of Life. Someone whose name God erases from His book will go to condemnation.

John was shown on Patmos that all the dead were gathered before the throne and the books were opened. The Prophet Daniel saw the same vision in his time. He saw how an innumerable group of people stood before God and the books were opened (Dan. 7:10).



ARTWORK: RAIMO ÖSTERBERG

When the disciples returned from their mission trip, they rejoiced that even the spirits were subject to their power. Jesus reminded them of the most important reason for a Christian’s joy, that is, that our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). This reason for joy is not bound to its time but is also our greatest reason for joy.

The Letter to the Corinthians states that all of us must appear before Christ’s judgement throne one day. Everyone will receive according to what they have done in their body, whether it was good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). This prospect inevitably awakens a personal question: What are my deeds like? Are they good or bad? What will my fate be when the books are opened?

Teaching about the last judgement, Jesus said that all nations will be gathered before Him. He will separate them one from another, like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. To the sheep gathered to His right, Jesus lists those works which the righteous have done. The righteous do not recognize these works in themselves, nor do they present them for merit (Matt. 25:32–40). Nevertheless, their portion was blessed in the Father’s kingdom.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

John could see the glory of the new heaven and the new earth on Patmos. Peter also saw the same vision with eyes of faith. He encouraged Christians to await the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). That is our goal also. We endeavor so that we one day can dwell in the new land of glory.

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