

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Advent 1, Year B, December 3, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Are You Ready?”
1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

remember Y2K?; that was 18 years ago now; remember that there were some who said it would be the end of the world as we knew it?; that our computers would not be able to handle the changeover from 1999 to 2000 because of short-cuts in computer programming; many feared that the power grids would shut down, so people stocked up on non-perishable foods and batteries; many feared that the banks would not be able to operate, so people got out plenty of cash; many feared that there would be civil unrest, so people made sure they had the guns and the safes needed to protect their family and their valuables; and remember what happened on December 31 of that year as 11:59 pm rolled over into midnight at the start of the new millennium?; the digits 12:00 clicked into view, the power stayed on, and the fact that nothing bad happened led to an ever bigger New Year’s Eve celebration than usual

but let’s also recall that the main reason nothing bad happened at the Y2K changeover was because many people worked long and hard ahead of time to be ready before that date in order to keep all of those dire consequences from happening; they knew what to do and they knew the deadline by when it had to be done

the situation presented in our Gospel reading today also depicts the end of the world as we know it; and with consequences far worse than those threatened by Y2K; no more sun, moon, or stars in the sky; the earth shaken from its foundations; the angels and Jesus himself—no longer distant figures from the pages of the Bible—now present among us in person to bring about judgment day; so we might rightly wonder, when this comes about, will I be ready for this?; and what sets this end of the world scenario apart from Y2K’s is that we do not know the date or the time for which we have to be prepared for Jesus’ second coming; we may not even be sure precisely what we need to do in order to be ready for it; passages such as this can be very unsettling when taken to heart

earlier this week I was blessed to have attended the diocesan clergy conference in which our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, was our speaker; calling him a

speaker does not do justice to how he comes across: he is a gifted preacher, definitely; someone said to me, after the conference, that Bishop Curry never stopped preaching the entire day; he probably never does stop; it seems that everything that comes out of his mouth is some kind of sermon; he is also quite a cheerleader, always encouraging everyone to follow Jesus; and he speaks with the authority of a prophet or an evangelist right out of the Bible; you know that you are in the presence of someone powerfully guided by the Holy Spirit, and he makes that Spirit contagious

Bishop Curry reminded us that if we really believe Jesus is alive, and not lying dead in a grave, then Jesus is busy—he's busy working through you, and me, and this church, and all churches, and even through people who may not know he is working through them; the Bible shows us, over and over again, how God is always at work, never at rest; Bishop Curry talks about this as the Jesus Movement, and he reminded us that the Jesus Movement is bigger than any church, and there is nothing that has ever been able to stop it, and nothing will ever be able to stop it; every one of us is part of this movement, and we do our part to further it every time we act, or think, or speak, like Jesus does

and our reading from 1st Corinthians today states the same idea; it says “you (plural) are not lacking in any spiritual gift”; “you (plural) were called into the fellowship of ... Jesus Christ”; we're all in this boat together, and the reason for us gathering as the church is to combine the spiritual gifts that each of us has in such a way that we can accomplish far more together than we ever could individually; we need each other to do Jesus' work; we need each other to be fully prepared in advance for judgment day

I expect you've heard of the “no child left behind” education policy; well I don't really know how successful it has been, or not, but I like the idea in that “no one left behind” thinking; Jesus has a “no soul left behind” salvation policy; just like an education policy requires a system of schools, administrators, teachers, textbooks, and practices all focused on student success; so Jesus' salvation policy makes use of a system of churches, pastors, teachers, the Bible, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit all focused on the preparation of Christians—us—for the fullness of life now, and for the extension of that fullness of life on into eternal life, beyond judgment day

so don't worry about being on your own in preparation for judgment day; that's what all of us are doing, working together as the body of Christ; and it is not just

that our combined efforts can make a difference in the world; we are not on our own; we are not alone: we have God's most powerful grace working on our behalf; Jesus is not dead, lying in a grave; he is busy; we have Jesus' teachings and example to follow; we have the Holy Spirit's power and guidance to help us