

March 13, 2022 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, St. Peter Lutheran Church, 2 Cor.5:20 - 6:10

*“Letter from the Future”*

I came across this letter. Is it a letter from the future? You be judge

Dear Church Member of the 4<sup>th</sup> row, lectern side,

I don't know if you'll get this letter or not. The normalcy of life has broken down. Oh, how I wish things were calm and peaceful, the way things used to be. Course they weren't always that way, but you forget. I looked back at 9/11, eastern European ethnic cleansing, the war on terror, middle East Desert storm, and Viet Nam – all in my life time. I looked back in our history at the Korean Conflict, World War Two's death camps and the First World War's clumsy killing. Lately, I've even been reading about the Civil War, but though they were all terrible, they can't hold a candle to the Day of the Lord. I've heard about the Day of the Lord in scripture. On Ash Wednesday, I remember hearing Joel 2 read and it was interesting. Now that I am living in it, I'd only wished I'd paid more attention to God's Word and the boundaries of His Word. You know I've gone to church like you. We were regulars. But being in control was important to me. Now, I don't control anything. The prophet isn't even that difficult to understand. I've been fortunate enough to find a Bible since they were all taken away. Do you recall the headlines, “Religion Contributes to Terrorism?” It was on every paper before churches and Bibles were banned. I should say “Christianity and Judaism” but the others followed along quickly. At first, the other five major world religions joined in with those who sided against Christianity and Judaism. Because we and our Jewish brothers said there was one God and out of Him absolute truth, our days were numbered. But now I have seen scripture come to life. I don't need to read it anymore as we are living in it, but I will. I once thought in my naiveté that I could use it like a map to avoid danger, but now I know its purpose is

to call me and others to repentance. The prophet wouldn't have had to write about such as terrible army except to say there would be one.

And the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of that scripture was about repentance. I dropped the ball on that too. Do you think it's too late for me? I know all my church involvement won't buy anything, but I am a believer. That should count for something. And yet, two letters ago, you reminded me that nothing we do earns God's good favor. You understand how important accepting His grace and living in faithful action would be in these last times.

In your last letter, you said you had sections of a Bible. So, we're both breaking the law. Hopefully, this letter won't be censored. It is type written to stay off my computer. I couldn't have written like this in e mail or like so many friends, I'd be in jail. I'm afraid I'm like you-just trying to survive, remain invisible, and continue praying. But you quoted about what Paul said to the Corinthian group (2 Cor.5:20-6:10) and it serves as a manifesto to me, a check list of sorts. Remember what you shared:

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, and now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness;*

*in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

I've kept your letters. They are refreshing and encouraging. Though I see so much around that frightens me, and makes me hopeless at times, I hang on to God with the help of your mail. As a check list, I have to ask myself first, have I been an ambassador for Christ? An ambassador represents his country to another, so we represent Jesus to others. I never took that very seriously. I've not helped people to get to know Jesus, to be reconciled to Him. It looked too bothersome to me to do anything like that. Now it's way more difficult with most freedoms gone. The only freedoms are license to do evil, it seems, but God's army is roving the earth taking out everything in its path just as Joel prophesied.

Another item on the checklist from that scripture is have I lived righteously for Him? If I answer that, this letter would turn into a confession. But I do accept Christ as my righteousness. I'll say that much.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> item on the checklist is about receiving God's grace in vain. This is difficult. That is what most of this letter is about – not taking Him seriously enough. Bonhoeffer used to say we are in danger of cheapening grace that we consider that we are saved by grace, period. Instead, we are saved by costly grace, which cost of the life of our Savior, means we are saved by grace for a reason: Christian living, service, mission and such. But I will not despair in spite of the *terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the*

*plague that destroys at midday. As the Psalmist went on to say, A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. (Psalm 91:5-7)* And it has not come near me because God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has seen fit to preserve me. I have not deserved it, so my heart is filled with love for the God of my salvation. I praise Him but not to bargain in order to save my skin. The Day of the Lord is indescribable. Joel and Revelation scriptures have done a pretty good job of painting the pictures, but so many have written off parts of the Bible they are not comfortable with. I know the other things on my check list have been a day-by-day experience. Having faith and living it in spite of trouble, hardships, distresses, imprisonment, beatings, sleepless nights, and hunger. Yet we are called to be pure and have forgotten what makes pure. Maybe you can write about that in your next letter. But I know we are called to get out of ourselves and understand with patience and even kindness. We are called to be truthful in speech and carry weapons of righteousness used in God's power. Glory or dishonor, good press or bad, known and yet unknown; sorrowful yet feeling joy of walking with Jesus, having nothing but possessing everything.

Mail has been delivered by a friend. So, it's been a few minutes since I've written, but I see that you know of what I speak. A note on the letter our courier was carrying says that you are in jail, so I hope my message can be passed on to you. It's so easy for me to be paranoid, but I will trust in the Lord and keep you in prayer. God's army is marching and nothing can stop it. I look forward to seeing you again in this life, but when the Lord comes and calls us homeward, we will meet on the other side at the Lamb's high feast. God bless you always.

Sincerely,

The nameless one who sat next to you in Church all these years – Amen