

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday In Advent, December 18, 2022**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 278, 598:1, 279, 444:1-3, 277.

Lessons: Isaiah 49:1-8,2 Corinthians 5:1-17, Mark 13:26-36.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

So what are you waiting for right now? Are you waiting for Christmas, when you may have family together and may get to unwrap presents? Are you waiting for some other special event to happen in your life?

Are you at this moment waiting for church to be over so you can get on with something else? Something that you really want to accomplish today? Maybe something you might think is more important or more interesting or that you really think that you have to do today?

Are you maybe waiting for something else?

And here's another idea related to waiting. Sometimes we don't do something when we should and we miss a deadline. Maybe we want to buy something and inadvertently wait until the sale is over so we don't get the special price. Maybe we don't use a coupon and we miss its expiration date.

Those kinds of questions kind of lead up to the sort of picture we can see when Paul tells us

**“NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION”**

- 1. What are you waiting for?**
- 2. Tomorrow – and maybe even today – is the judgement.**

What are you waiting for? So how much time do you have left here on earth?

When we are young, we think we have lots of our life left – all the time in the world! And as we get older, we still see lots of time likely left in our lives.

I think that every one of us has things we want to accomplish while we are on earth. For many in this world it is a “bucket list”, you know, a whole bucket of things you want to do before you ‘kick the bucket’, that is, before you die. Perhaps the older we get, we wish we would be able to do more things, since we know that our time on earth is really getting shorter.

There are some times in your life when you will not wait and will not waste any time in doing something. If you hear a fire alarm, you get out of the building. If a tornado is coming at you, you head for shelter. If flood waters are coming toward you, you get out of the way. You don't – and really shouldn't – just wait around and think you have lots of time in such circumstances.

Paul had just been talking about the ministry of reconciliation which had been entrusted to him. We read in verses just before our sermon text: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 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.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NIV)

After inviting, encouraging and imploring his readers to be reconciled to God, we read: *“now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!”* 2 Corinthians 6:2 (CSB) and in another translation: *“Behold, now*

*is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*” Corinthians 6:2 (ESV) and in yet a third translation: *I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*” All these are good, valid translations.

Our sermon text should be really be like a fire alarm – warning us about the fires of hell.

This is a sharp invitation to accept the grace of God now and not delay! God’s grace, his undeserved love, has been given to you, and you are being reminded of it right now.

You have heard – how many times in your lifetime? – that Jesus Christ died for your sins and also offers to give you faith in that Gospel message so that you can go to heaven when you die.

He says ‘we beseech you; we beg of you, we urge you’: Don’t **“receive God's grace in vain.”** In effect he is saying ‘don’t let that message “go in one ear and out the other’. God’s grace is free but it wasn’t cheap. It cost a life – the life of the sinless Son of God.

So what do we mean by **“in vain”**? Uselessly. Don’t throw it away! Can I offer an earthly example? An example of that kind of thing might be someone giving you some very useful and valuable object, or a special tool or some special gift – and you just don’t use it or even throw it away.

What has God given you? His love. His forgiveness. His hope and assurance of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He has even given you faith to believe that so that it can be yours!

Don’t reject the grace of God, don’t harden your heart against it. Don’t waste another day by ignoring the Word of God.

Every sermon must preach Law and Gospel – the harshness of the Law to make the sweetness of the Gospel mean something. For if I have no understanding of my sins, why would I need the Gospel, which tells me of the forgiveness of my sins?

Luther wrote “To accept the grace of God in vain can be nothing else than hearing the pure Word of God, in which the grace of God is offered, and yet remaining apathetic and not accepting [or believing] it, remaining as one was before.” If the grace of God is offered but is not accepted by the hearers, it will result in their everlasting condemnation instead of profiting them. Paul wrote chapters earlier: **“To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.”** 2 Corinthians 2:16 (NIV)

In addition to this kind of law message, Paul is also saying ‘let your light shine!’ He pleads with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

So in these verses we also have admonition to hear the Gospel. Paul is appealing to fellow Christians and really to all mankind to hear the message of the grace of God. He is appealing to hear it and to benefit from it.

Paul is carrying out the Gospel-ministry when he gives us the Lord’s urgent invitation to accept the reconciliation that God gave us in Christ. God is no longer angry with us because of our sins.

Paul and all Christians are God’s ambassadors, working with him for the salvation of men’s souls.

God has offered salvation, and it is not safe to neglect it.

The gospel is a word of grace sounding in our ears; but it will be in vain for us to hear it, unless we believe it, and make it and its teachings a part of our lives.

Right now, the present time, is the only proper season, the only right time, the only good time and day to accept the grace that is offered. NOW is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation,

Today is the day of salvation. The Gospel is the message of salvation. The means of grace is the means of salvation, the offers of the gospel are the offers of salvation, and the present time the only proper time to accept these offers: To-day, while it is called to-day.

We don’t own tomorrow. We don’t even know if we will have a tomorrow! We can see this in our present world situation, including illnesses, diseases, and nations fighting with each other and violence on our streets, in our places of business, and even in our schools!

We do not know what will happen tomorrow. We do not know if the truth of the Word of God will be available to us! Look at the history of the spread of the Gospel in the world. Asia Minor had the Gospel once and is now a Muslim nation. Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden had the pure Gospel once and now it can scarcely be found there. We do not know where we shall be and we should remember that God’s season of grace is short and uncertain. It will end when Jesus Christ comes in judgment. We can’t go back to yesterday, and we can’t relive today. We have a duty as God’s children to live as God’s children and it is in our best interest to make use of the Gospel and the means of grace now, today. Our salvation depends on it!

If a person pretends interest in the forgiveness of sins, but will not truly repent of his sins; if he makes a practice of talking about Jesus, but himself trusts in his own merits; if he is a member of a congregation but leads a life by which the mercy of God is disgraced, then such a person must feel the weight of God's law in these words: ***“now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”***

Paul makes reference to words from Isaiah to show this is not a new idea in his time, nor is it a new idea today. You heard from Isaiah even in our Old Testament lesson: ***“This is what the LORD says: ‘In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances.’”*** Isaiah 49:8 (NIV) What better example for God's Old Testament people than restoring the land that had been destroyed or conquered by foreigners, and giving it back to the clans and families to whom it had been given, as we read in the book of Joshua.

The Corinthians were hearing and seeing God's grace. We, today, this very hour, are hearing and seeing God's grace.

What God had promised through his Son, his great Servant, the Messiah, is right in front of the eyes of the Corinthians and right in front of your eyes right now.

Now is the day of salvation. Since Christ, the Savior, the very Son of God has come to earth in the flesh, the right time has come, the time of God's good pleasure, the time of his good will toward men is right now.

If the time of grace is neglected, if its invitation is ignored, it may soon be past forever. Luther wrote: “Now that God has given us His mercy in such rich measure,... truly it is necessary that we do not set the grace of God at naught and let Him knock in vain. He is standing at the door: well for us if we open to Him. He is saluting us; blessed [is] he that answers. If we overlook His passing, who will bring Him back?”

Today is the day of salvation.

God is freely extending his grace to all sinners that will hear his call, including you! We also find that invitation in the book of Hebrews: ***“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) The apostle Paul also writes in Romans: ***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”*** Romans 5:1-2 (NIV) Rejoice today! ***“Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”*** Amen.