

Preparing for the End of Days

A great season of preparation has begun. People are preparing for so many different things. Hunters are preparing for Opening Day, deer season, and the deer camp adventures that often go with it. Christmas shoppers are preparing their lists, their ads, and their strategies for navigating stores through Gray Thursday, Black Friday, and all of the sales that are about to begin. And of course, families are preparing homes and food for the gatherings and celebrations of Thanksgiving.

Yet there is another preparation that most people overlook, even though it is, perhaps, the most important of all. It's something we mark and remember during the closing Sundays the Church Year but, sadly, most people are too busy with other things to notice. Still, before we begin a new Church Year with another Advent season, we bring the old one to a close by preparing for the End of Days.

The Last Day. Judgment Day. Such words often conjure up images of death and destruction, things we don't want to look at or think about when we're all caught up in the busyness of life and living. Perhaps that's why funerals hit us as hard as they often do: we spend most of our time and energy *not* preparing for them.

That's a reasonable way to live, I suppose, for those who live in dread of the Last Day. All they can see is the end of life as they know it. No more "fun." No more "good times." Just a great dark unknown, stretching on forever. Or, as many people would like to believe, a great nothingness, the end of existence.

According to a Harris poll a couple of years ago, 74% of Americans believe in God. 68% believe in heaven, 64% believe the soul will survive after death, but only 58% believe in hell. According to the polls, about a quarter of the people in the world just don't know what comes next.

Scary, isn't it? That means a lot of people are going to be very unpleasantly surprised when that Day comes! It also means there's a lot of work for us believers to do, telling the Good News about Jesus!

What's even scarier is that there are many people who claim to be Christians who have no idea what's going to happen at the end of days. When Christians don't take the time to prepare for the Last Day because they are uncertain and afraid of what that day will bring, we've got a problem.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior can certainly live enjoying this life. At the same time we are to be *in* the world yet not *of* the world. That means we live out our lives here while constantly watching for that great Last Day that is yet to come.

And what will that Last Day bring to all who believe? The second coming of Christ. The resurrection of the dead. Immortal bodies free from sin. The end of all sorrow, sadness, pain, and death. Joyous reunions with those we love who have departed this life in the faith. Sitting down at the beginning of the never-ending feast at God's own table. All this, and more wonderful things that we cannot even begin to imagine.

Each November, we dive into preparations for the Thanksgiving-through-Christmas season and all its events, knowing that all these things will soon pass away. This year, alongside those joys, lift your eyes to an even greater joy that is yet to come, a joy that will never pass away. Look forward to and, with Word and Sacraments, worship and prayer, prepare for the End of Days. For when Jesus comes on that great Last Day, then our celebrations will really begin!

The Collect for Thanksgiving Day

*Almighty God, Your mercies are new every morning
and You graciously provide for all our needs of body and soul.
Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your goodness,
give thanks for Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience all our days;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.*