

Jude 20-25

One month from today is Christmas. Here on November 25, the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we are told to stay awake because the Lord's coming will soon take place. On December 25 we celebrate His coming. But that one was in a manger. The next one will be in the clouds of judgment. And for that one we have no date for our calendar.

This presents us with a challenge. We're planners. We have schedules and we live by them. We knew that Thanksgiving Day was last Thursday, and we planned for it. We know that Christmas is thirty days from now; that the new year begins one week after that. We can look to see on which Sunday Easter will fall. We put birthdays and anniversaries on our calendar and so we are not surprised when they arrive. But for Jesus' last coming we have nothing. Not a year, month, or day even to just pencil in. And when He comes, that's it. It's all over. The world ends.

For planners this is a real headache. How are we supposed to function? Jesus could come this very minute, or not for many years. How are we supposed to live with this gigantic question mark hanging over everything?

St. Jude tells us. Four things. Four things we are to do. Three of them all Christians are always doing, and one he implores us to do and keep doing. They're in our text...Jude 20 and 21: "*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Did you catch the four things? Building, praying, keeping, waiting.

Between now and Christmas we are also doing four things: shopping, wrapping, baking, decorating. But we know the deadline. And so we procrastinate. We put these four things off until Christmas is almost upon us. We dare not do that with Jude's four things. For then the end will come upon us suddenly and we will not be prepared.

First building. "*Building yourselves up in your most holy faith.*" Ecclesiastes tells us there is a time for everything, including a time to build. That time is now. If we're not building then we're taking our rest. And the only reason we would do that is if the structure was completed. But it's not. We are building ourselves up in the faith. And the building up of our faith continues all our life. We can rest when we're dead. It's true. For upon death we enter the Sabbath rest of heaven. But if we're not dead, and I think that's all of us here, then we have some building to do.

Some of us are taking this building thing seriously. Others of us are pretty lazy...spiritually lazy. Maybe you'll squeak by, but what about your children? Are they learning to build themselves up in the faith? Or are they learning from you to take their rest? Building. It's the first of Jude's four things.

Next is praying. "*Praying in the Holy Spirit.*" We build as if it all depends upon us, and we pray as if it all depends upon God. And here's why. Scripture says that *unless God builds the house, those who build it labor in vain*. Building and praying go together. We build ourselves up in our faith by making God's Word, God's House, God's Sacraments our dwelling place. For this Satan will attack us. He will oppose us. He will try to make us lazy and take our rest. And so we must pray. In prayer we do not stop building, but rather we place the hammer into God's hands. Praying. It's the second of Jude's four things.

Keeping is next. *“Keep yourselves in the love of God.”* This is the only one of Jude’s four things which is an imperative. The other three are participles. Keep. Do not stray from the truth. Do not allow someone else - a boyfriend or girlfriend, a spouse, a relative, a pastor - to pull you away into false teaching, into a false church. But keep yourself in the love of God.

A false church will put the emphasis upon your love. But your love is not good enough. Your love is to be a response to the love of God. God’s love for you is Christ. God’s love is seen at the cross, in the death of Jesus for you. God’s love is poured out upon you in your baptism. God’s love is received in the Sacrament.

God’s love translates into mercy. He knows that you and I are not the best builders, and that you and I are slack in our praying. Yet He loves you no less. We can even say that He loves you more. He extends His mercy even more to us who are falling behind. And this I know...that He never stops forgiving you. Because He loves to forgive. It’s His favorite thing to do. His anger is but for a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime.

It’s why you are here today. He drew you here to His house not so Pastor Bell could preach to you. So He could. I’m just His mouthpiece. The words are His. The love is His, and you are His. And He implores you, out of pure love for you, to keep yourself in His love. Guard what you have been given in your baptism. Let no one take your crown. It’s too precious. You are too precious. Keep. It’s the third of Jude’s four things.

And the final one is “waiting.” *“Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* I wish Jesus would return today. No more troubles, no more strife, no more sin and death; only the joy of heaven forevermore. But I’m being selfish. I am called upon to wait. You are to wait. Wait for God’s mercy. He is not slow in coming, writes St. Peter, as some count slowness, but *“He is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*

There is someone in your life, and in mine, who needs to be shown mercy. And Jesus will not come back until that happens. One of Jesus’ precious sheep for whom He suffered, died, and rose again needs to be told of His love, of His sufferings and death for them. And if you and I don’t do it, who will?

We’re not here for the fun of it. Otherwise we’d be in heaven right now. We’re still here because God is patient. The only reason the world has not come to its end is because there are people who do not yet know the love of Jesus; people who need to be reached with the Gospel; who need to be brought to Holy Baptism; brought into Jesus’ arms which is His church.

And some of these precious people know of Him, but have drifted away. They need to be brought back. And you and I are the ones God is using to do His saving work. If God is patient, then we should be also. While we’re building ourselves up in the faith; while we are praying; while we are keeping ourselves in the love of God, we are waiting with Him because we cannot rush repentance; we cannot rush the work of God.

And if that one to be reached is you, my friend, then today, for you, is the day of salvation because the same Jesus who will return on the Last Day is here today to receive you into His love. Each one of you is being addressed this morning. *“But you, beloved...”* writes St. Jude. Since you are God’s beloved, you are building, you are praying, you will continue to keep, and you will be one who is waiting. We do not know when the end will come, but we do know it will. And better still, we know the love God has for us, and so we wait for Him who is even now present with us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.