



President Robert Bugbee

All the Time in the World

You don't have all the time in the world. I don't, either. It is not unhealthy to think about that. It's actually helpful. You may have heard someone say after the death of a loved one, "I wish I had told her sooner how I really feel," or "If I had a chance to talk to Grandpa again, I'd ask about what it was like during the war," or whatever you are craving to know. It may seem now that you took time with that person for granted, and that you would have handled things differently if you had been more conscious of the limited time you actually had.

You don't have all the time in the world. The early Christians were convinced of it. They believed what the angels told the apostles the day Christ ascended: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). They were cheered by Jesus' last words recorded in the Bible: "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20).

To be sure, the strong expectation of the Lord's second coming went wonky when some believers "jumped the gun" and stopped doing productive work. Work seemed silly to them when they were expecting His return "any minute now," so to speak. Others got upset because fellow Christians were dying before Jesus' return. They were afraid these dear ones were missing out on the glories the Coming One would bring. You read how Paul taught in 1 and 2 Thessalonians to dispel their confusion.

As the years went by, Christ's Church built this into its basic faith-statements: "He [Christ] will come

again with glory to judge both the living and the dead," as believers keep confessing week by week in the Nicene Creed. This is not some obscure detail. It is foundational. Let me say it clearly: To deny the truth of the Lord's Second Coming is to deny Christ, at least if you're talking about the Christ of the Bible.

The temptation for 21st century followers of Jesus may be the opposite of the one besetting the early Christians. Because human structures have endured for twenty centuries since He ascended, you may be tempted to behave as though His return will never come. Yes, you keep confessing the creeds and repeating the statements. Still, you may not be listening deeply to what you yourself are saying at that moment. In other words, you may neglect to let your confession of Christ's return truly shape the way you look at life, and direct what you say and do.

About the time these lines reach you, we'll be finishing up with the worldwide celebration of the 500th Anniversary of Luther's Reformation. Our heritage gives us cause to praise God. Among other things, our ancestors in the faith in Luther's day held fast to Scripture's teaching on Christ's return. Now the celebrations are winding down. This is a ripe moment for us—and yes, for you personally—to ask, "What difference does it make that Jesus is coming again? How can I see to it that the precious heritage the early Christians and our Lutheran forebears handed down to me isn't just a matter of something *they* believed *way back when*? What is

the Lord teaching me through it for today and for the remaining time He gives me?"

Let's come full circle to what I wrote at the beginning: You don't have all the time in the world. Just as it is vital to recognize the time you have with a friend or family member as precious and not to be taken for granted, the time you have to live with and for Christ in this world is precious, too. It can be deadly to put off the need to repent of the sins of your life, or to postpone Jesus' urgent call to come and take His pardon, still offered to you today in His Word and at His Table. You don't have all the time in the world to play your part in encouraging other believers in the body of Christ, and to build up your church family as a priority matter. You don't have all the time in the world to speak of Jesus as God opens the door for you to do, especially if you've got a neighbour, a friend, or a co-worker who doesn't know Him... and whom God has not put there near you by accident.

As we move into November and the end of the church year, Sunday Bible readings at church focus strongly on "end times" teaching: the end of the world as we know it, Christ's second coming, judgment, and the promise of life everlasting. Those truths from God can keep you from living an aimless life and from wasting the time He's gives you today as a precious gift. It's a great wonder how Jesus' clear word on what is yet to come can be a powerful force to give meaning to your life right now.