

*“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” 2 Peter 3:10, NIV.*

This is a time of closings. Our church year will soon close, signaling a series of readings based on the end times. Life closes up for the long Wisconsin Winter months. Elections signal the end of a presidency. We as a congregation wrap up 140 years. Our community and families close to us have lost loved ones. And it's hard to say good-bye to all our fond memories of years gone by. As we look back, we remember the fond memories of the “golden years” that we never recognized for their shine at the time.

Yet with every ending comes a new beginning. The church year begins anew with the season of Advent and the message that Jesus the Christ is coming to save us. The snow will soon melt and water budding trees, flowers, and fields. A new president will, by God's power, hopefully repair any damage done by previous mistakes and bring hope to a nation. We begin year number 141 and pray that, by God's grace, we may use the means given us to carry the message of salvation “to all nations” or even just our community. We await the fulfillment of the promise of the end of the “speck of eternity” when we will be reunited with our loved ones and our Savior.

It's been said that a gravestone bears the year you were born and the year you die with a dash in between, but what matters is how you use your “dash”, the years you've been given on this earth between those two dates. What would God have us do with those years? Jesus summed it up in the two greatest commandments: Love God above all else, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Why love God? Luther had trouble with this command, because how can anyone love a harsh judge? Yet he found love when he realized that our God is a harsh judge of sin, but He carried out His judgment on Jesus, who became sin for us. To you and me, who deserve His judgment, He says, “This is my son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.”

And how do we express that love? Through putting God first, and the easiest way to do that is to love each other, sharing the love of Christ with each other by sharing God's Word through our speech and actions, showing compassion to those who are suffering and leading the lost to their loving Savior.

We live in “the end times,” but even the end times will come to an end, and there is our hope in Jesus' name. Amen.