

Sermon 2006 2nd Last Sunday
Text: Daniel 7:9-10
Theme: "The Books Were Opened"

We have watched for years as our legal system wrestles with what to do with hardened criminals who have committed atrocious acts of violence; life in prison or death? Those states that have opted for the death penalty have death row where the worst convicts wait to be killed. Death row is not a fun place to be. Imagine not only the suffering attached to being in prison, but add to that the horror of knowing that your life will soon be taken from you. Now add on to that the fear of what will happen to you after that poison cocktail is injected into your veins, and if you are the least bit unsure about your relationship with Jesus, imagine the fear of knowing that you will face eternal judgment imminently.

You might be in favor of the death penalty and you might be against it. Good Christian people stand on both sides of that debate, but you dare not be smug about it for we are ALL on death row. We have all done, said and thought things of which we are very ashamed and should be punished.

It is no small thing to take the life of another human being regardless of the circumstances for doing so for at that moment all opportunities to repent are gone and their fate is sealed. Every soldier who has killed in service to his nation; every police officer who has killed in the line of duty; every judge who has handed down a death sentence; every doctor who has made a fatal mistake knows those demons well. It is a terrible thing to send a human being into the presence of the Ancient of Days.

We understand that death is eternally final. At the moment we die, we find ourselves standing before the great and terrible throne of the Ancient of Days, the Creator of the Universe, God Almighty. At that moment, we have no case to plead. We have no opportunity to repent. We have no way of fixing the stupid things we have done, said or thought. IT IS ALL OVER – and at that moment, all that is left is the sentencing. ***And the books are opened.***

Each and every one of us will face that day so the question is not “will I stand before the judgment throne or not?” The question is not, “will I be judged or not?” The question is “by

what criteria will I be judged?" That is all that really matters and that is what is in the books that are opened; the criteria – the standards by which we are judged.

God has two different books by which to judge us: The Book of Works and the Book of Life. The Book of Works is just that, a listing of the good we have done over against the sin we have committed. You don't want that book used. Remember that God's requirement is for us to be holy as he is holy, so if you have committed even one sin, you are no longer holy and no number of works can offset even one sin.

The Book of Life is where you want to be. You know the old saying, "it's not what you know but who you know." Jesus died and suffered hell to pay for every sin every human being ever committed. The work is done. The payment is made. The treasure is ours. So what's the problem?

Pride. Pride is the problem. We don't like admitting that we need Jesus. We don't mind treating him like a lucky charm that we wish on when things are rough – but NEED is a big word. He's not a rich uncle who bails us out from time to time. He is

the one who is the very center of our lives: not work, not sports, not family, not fun, not school, not popularity, not love, not anything...just Jesus and if Jesus is not at the center YOU ARE IN DANGER.

Why are you in danger when you start putting other things and other people before Jesus? Is it because you'll tick Jesus off and he'll take salvation away? No. The work is done and the treasure is already yours. It is because that is the way Satan gets a foothold in your life. All he needs is a small crevice and he will stick his pitchfork in that crevice and start prying. He is VERY patient. He will work and work and work until he can worm his dirty, evil, little self, into your life.

So it starts something like this. Well, we can't worship this week because we're going on vacation, or there's a tournament or a really important practice, or we just HAVE TO HAVE some rest (we'll just ignore the fact that there are 10 different Christian congregations within a 2 mile radius of Trinity with worship opportunities on Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Wednesday). Then we get sick the next week and can't make it

to worship. Then we have to fly out on Sunday morning for work. Now, we have missed 3 weeks in a row. We have deprived ourselves of God's Word, Body and Blood. We have begun to forget about the power of our Baptisms. We have starved ourselves and our faith is weaker.

Now the prying starts in earnest and various temptations are thrown in our path that a few weeks ago we might have been strong enough to avoid. But now, we are weaker and we succumb. Pry harder, Satan! Now we feel guilty and ashamed of ourselves for giving in so easily to those temptations and we just cannot face *that pastor and those church people*. And a few more weeks go by, and a few more...and a few more.

Soon we have become disconnected from the Church and Satan has a nice cozy place in our life. He didn't even really have to try because our faith was so weak. And as his position in our life becomes stronger, our connection to Jesus becomes weaker and we begin to forget that we are on death row and that the end is immanent...and that is just what Satan is counting on.

As we approach the end of the Church year, we have these texts of doom show up to remind us that there will come a time when it is too late. There will come a day, either when we die or when Jesus returns, and we will find ourselves standing before the Ancient of Days and the **books will be open**. Which books do you want used to judge your life?

I want the book of life. I want to be so connected to Jesus that there is not even a question of works. I want the Ancient of Days to look at me, look at the book of life and see my name written in Jesus' blood...and then I want to hear him say welcome to paradise, good and faithful servant. AMEN.