

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

"Christ's Return: A Sure and Certain Hope"

WIKILEAKS FALLOUT

I am sure everyone here has heard about the Wikileaks website and the problems it has caused. Founder Julian Assange has created a firestorm of controversy by revealing thousands of illegally obtained classified documents. Such leaks should be a concern for every American citizen because they have the potential to disrupt American foreign policy and commerce as well as put American lives at risk.

Notice that he is not primarily concerned with leaking secrets from other nations. His focus is on the US. Why? Because he wants to show the corruption of the American government. Assange is clearly anti-American. And while there is nothing wrong with exposing true wrongdoing, it is clear that this is not Assange's true motivation. He is in it to make a name for himself and to cause mischief and to try to discredit the US government.

THREE WORLDS

Now if there is one thing we can learn from the uproar it is this: there are really three realities in our world; the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. The physical world is what we can observe and see. The psychological world is the world of inner thoughts and actions that are done in private or closed doors. The spiritual world is that world that cannot be observed or experienced simply through the natural world. This world is hidden from our eyes and is of another realm and dimension.

The Wikileaks saga is so controversial because it is about bringing into the light that which is otherwise hidden. In other words, there are things done that people don't even know are happening. Governments can do such things both for good and for evil behind closed doors just as we can and often do ourselves.

The Bible warns us about these hidden worlds. In fact, these worlds are more important than the obvious world of natural appearances. In **I Sam. 16:7** we read, ***But the LORD said to Samuel (concerning King Saul), "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."***

Heb. 4:12 says, ***"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."***

The truth is good and evil do battle in all three worlds - the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. This shouldn't surprise us for human beings consist of three realities - body, mind, and spirit. There is a oneness to the person, just like there is a oneness to God and even to all of creation - everything is interdependent on the other. But which world is most important? The spiritual world. St. Paul reminds us in **2 Cor. 4:16-18**: *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

THE HIDDEN SPIRITUAL REALM

While there is much that we simply do not know about concerning the spiritual realm, we can have a good understanding from God's Word and by observing the natural world. In both worlds, the spiritual principles are the same. The Bible speaks of a world of angelic beings – both those that are benevolent and those who are evil – that we often cannot see. Let's look for a moment at **Daniel 10:10-21** to get a glimpse of this other world. Daniel has been in prayer for 21 days and then God grants him a vision of one of His angels who has been sent to reveal the future of Israel and our world. We will pick up at v. 10 (at home please begin reading at v. 1).

10*Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. **11**He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. **12**Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. **13**"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. **14**"Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future."*

15*When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. **16**And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was standing before me, "O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. **17**"For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me."*

18*Then this one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. **19**He said, "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!" Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, "May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." **20**Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. **21**"However, I*

will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince.

THE FORCES OF DARKNESS ARE REAL

We know that Daniel was visited by an angel who was high-ranking and powerful. This angel mentions another "prince" – Michael - who is later identified as *the prince of the Jewish people* in **Daniel 12:1**. This is the Archangel Michael who is also mentioned in **Jude 9** and **Revelation 12:7**. Notice that the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece are in opposition to the things of God. From this Scripture it becomes clear that these are malevolent angels. From this we can deduce that there are angels assigned to nations. I also believe there are angels assigned to families, and some believe there are angels assigned to individuals. I also believe we have the authority to call upon the good angels by the name of Jesus, just like we have the authority to ask anything according to God's will in Christ's name. And those who do not follow the Lord open themselves up to fallen angels otherwise known as demonic beings.

The truth is we need to be praying against these forces of darkness. Evil is all around us. I just read a couple days ago a report from the US Department of Labor of how an estimated 115 million children worldwide are child workers, working in dangerous conditions that are hazardous to their health. The report goes on to say that *"the worst forms of child labor include slavery, forced labor, debt bondage, trafficking, illicit activities like drug dealing, commercial sexual exploitation and armed conflict, as well as hazardous working conditions, such as mining for precious metals or jewels in lakes filled with chemicals and nothing more."*

We hear what is going on in the Korean Peninsula - talk about two extremes – the North is gripped by a diabolical regime while the South is free and has experienced a great Christian revival. With the North developing nuclear weapons and attacking the South two times in the last year, the Korean Peninsula can erupt in war at any moment. In Mexico – the killing seems to be nonstop. And then, of course, there is the Middle East and the rise of fundamentalist Islam. The truth is N. Korea is a dark place. Iran is a dark place. The Islamic Curtain is a dark place. And there are dark places in our land - Hollywood is a dark place, certain parts of our cities, colleges and universities – they are dark places. But do we retreat? Do we hunker down in the comfort of our homes and not go outside? Absolutely not! We know who is going to win. We know how it all ends because of one clear fact: Jesus Christ is coming back.

JESUS HAS OVERCOME AND WE CAN TOO

Jesus said in **Jn. 16:33**, *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* The darkness cannot overcome the light of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us in that we are to expose the deeds of darkness. Ever see what happens when you turn over a rock in the forest, those little night crawlers flee, don't they? St. Paul writes, *"for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."* **2 Cor. 10:4**. Paul is not talking about forts, he is talking about supernatural evil dominion. Jesus said in **Mt. 16:18** that *"This gospel shall be preached and the gates of hell shall not*

prevail." The Apostle John wrote in **I Jn. 3:8**, *"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."*

Yes a terrible war is raging, there are battles to be fought and battles to be won. And the reason why we can look up and take courage is because there is coming a day when everything will be judged and restored: the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. That's what we look forward to. The day when God and His people will be vindicated, when evil will be destroyed. It's coming. But it's all wrapped around Jesus Christ's return.

Do you know the Bible talks about Jesus return over 380 times? And when we look at the Bible we find that the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be the greatest event of all of the ages. It is mentioned more than any other event in God's Word. For example, we all know that the new birth is vitally important, but it is mentioned only nine times in the New Testament. Baptism is vitally important, but it is found only 20 times in the New Testament. Repentance is essential but it is only talked about 70 times in the Bible. But what about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Our Lord's return is mentioned in God's Word over 380 times. One out of every 25 verses points to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why the Bible calls it the Blessed Hope.

WHY SO LONG?

Some may say why does God wait so long to come? I'll give you some reasons. We are in the age of grace; the last age of human history on this present earth. **Hebrews 1:1-2** says, *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son."* God wants to show what the world can be like with the coming of the Savior, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is to display His power, to show what is in the heart of man, to vindicate His promise and Word. That which Satan took away, God is going to give back. But it also is to demonstrate God's power and will to the supernatural realm. Look for a moment at what **Ephesians 3:9-10** says *"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."* Did you catch that? The wisdom of God to be known to the rulers and authorities *in heavenly places*. In other words, to the supernatural world and all the angels both good and evil! And so this final age of grace is not only an opportunity for people to see what it means to follow God in the context of a fallen world, but it is to show the power and wisdom of God to all creation including the world we cannot see with the naked eye.

But there is another reason that God waits. It is to demonstrate His mercy to succeeding generations. **2 Peter 3:3-8** says, *³First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But they*

deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Christ waits not because He doesn't love us or wants us to suffer. Rather He waits so that His mercy can be extended to as many people as possible. The truth is if Jesus came a couple hundred years ago, none of us would have experienced life or salvation. Thank God the Lord tarried!

HE IS COMING BACK!

It may seem like a long time, but it's coming. We are getting closer. You know 2000 years ago the Jews thought He was just coming for them. They were wrong. The truth is He is coming for all who believe and love him. Jesus said we won't know the day or the hour of His Return. He told us always to be ready. Sometimes we can look at that as just a reference to the end of the age - the day that life will end on this present planet. But I believe it is a universal warning for everyone. You see there is a coming of Christ both individually and corporately. God has a plan for each person ever made, and He has a plan for the whole human family. We don't know the day or hour of our death. We must be ready because the Bible says in **Hebrews 9:27** that *it is appointed for man to die once, and then comes judgment*. There aren't any second chances. Once we live our life it is over. The same is true for the planet earth. The good news is that even though we don't know all the particulars and how every detail will pan out, we do know it will work out in the end.

But until then, Jesus said there will be turmoil, there will be uncertainty, there will be anxiety, there will be fear. We see this every decade. The other day I came across a cover article from an issue of LIFE magazine August 4, 1958, written by General James Gavin, dated 1959. Do you know what was the title? "***We Are in Mortal Danger.***" There are always reasons we can be fearful and anxious and worried. But usually it is about the wrong things. We worry about the hypothetical's rather than the things of God.

Jesus said don't worry, don't be afraid, don't be anxious - even about the basics of life, ***but seek first the kingdom of God.*** I have said it before and I will say it again - there are three types of people in this world - those who are afraid, those who do not know enough to be afraid and those who know Jesus Christ! If you know Jesus, you don't have to fret, you don't have to worry, you don't have to be afraid. He's not only coming back but He's got all things under control. We just need to learn to trust and obey the Lord and fight the good fight of faith, all the while looking forward to the day when we see Him as He really is. That my friends is not just a message for the season of Advent, it is a message for every season of the year. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!