

Christian has a wart on the bottom of one of his toes. We just discovered this the other day. Or shall I say, I discovered this the other day. He told me he'd had it for a while and that I shouldn't worry about it, because it only hurts when he walks or stands. So we've been treating it with those special Compound W bandaids in the hopes that it will be gone in a few weeks. The alternative, I told him, was that we might have to go to the doctor and have it burned off.

This caused him some alarm.

“Will that hurt?” he asked.

“Maybe,” I answered, “but if we ignore it, it will hurt for a long time every time you walk or stand. Or if we go to the doctor, it will hurt for a short time and then be gone. Which do you think would be better?”

“To burn it off and get rid of it,” he answered. “But first,” he added, “let's pray real hard that the bandaids work.”

It raises an interesting question about today's readings, especially in relation to the issue of God's judgment. Today we give careful and creative thought to the prophet Malachi and the author of Hebrews. While Lutheran Christians do not believe in an eternal hell, due to Christ's descent into hell, we do believe in God's judgment, when Christ comes again at the end of time as we know it and the beginning of God's perfected kingdom. But we tend to skate around the issue of judgment, because it sounds

so very scary, and we don't want to scare people....But it's far scarier to ignore it.

Today's readings push us to consider something in a fresh way...does the idea of God's judgment have to be entirely scary? Let's use my initial illustration of a wart, as unappealing as it might be, because I think it offers an interesting insight into the different dimensions of God's judgment.

Yes, the idea of the eternal and all-powerful and all-knowing God coming to judge every human being according to our sins is a terrifying thing. Yes, the idea of God returning to judge every human being because we repeatedly do the very things he's asked us not to do since the dawn of time is terrifying. Yes, the idea of God coming to me to search my heart and unearth those very things I have spent my life covering up is terrifying. NO one needs to be convinced that the idea of God burning away all that nastiness we carry around in our souls is terrifying.

But perhaps God's judgment is merciful, in the same way that getting a wart burned off is merciful. The wart will hurt either way, either endured secretly forever, causing the person grief and suffering with each and every step...or, burned off in a short and intense blast of pain, and then it's gone, and the person is free from pain and suffering...We are all the bearers of crippling spiritual warts.

There are warts within my soul and within my heart that I would love for God to burn away. There are emotional warts that bring me pain with each and every step that I would love for God to burn away. There are memories of hurt that I have endured and

hurt that I have inflicted that I would love for God to burn away. There are tendencies and impulses I battle every day that I would love for God to burn away...because then I would be free from these impurities, these spiritual warts. Gone forever.

And the same can be said for you...the same internal suffering, the same hidden grief, the same shameful tendencies, the same crippling memories...you bear your own spiritual warts that cause you pain with each and every step, and wouldn't you love for God to burn them away in a single blast of judgment, rather than to live forever haunted by your brokenness, like some sort of Christian vampire?

The comfort of God' impending and inevitable judgment is that it will finally burn away those very things we weep to be rid of. The gospel of God's impending and inevitable judgment is that God cares enough about you and me to come back and purify us, rather than abandoning us and washing his hands of us for the rest of eternity. The joy in God's impending and inevitable judgment is that there is eternal freedom from this crippling pain we live with every single day.

It is true that God loves us, warts and all. God can forgive our warts and see the saint that is within us sinners. God can mend and heal every spiritual wart that makes us shake our fists at him in anger and in pain. God can even send his Son to die for us, because we cannot achieve perfection on our own, because we are not able to get rid of our spiritual warts that bring us anguish. Yes, God can love us, warts and all. But we do not love ourselves, warts and all. And that is why God will send his Son again, to finish

what he began on the cross, to finally cleanse and purify a world full of wart-y people.

There is gospel in this in the same way that there is gospel in the doctor saying, “This will only hurt for a minute, and then it will all be over.” God's judgment is not eternal, but his mercy is. God's judgment must come, because we are simply not able to make ourselves clean. It might sound scary, but the alternative is worse...no one wants to walk around forever with a wart on their foot, causing them to limp and wince in pain with each and every step. That is why we pray for Jesus to come again, as he promised he would, and to come quickly, because so many of us are waiting for him, in order to finally be the free and joyful people that we were created to be.