

Pastor Jon's November 8th Sermon

How do you get ready for something when you don't know the date and time it will happen?

This reminds me of Marcella, our 4 year old, who has discovered advertising... or more likely, it has discovered her. If she sees a toy that she wants in an ad, she will say something like, "Can I have that for my birthday?"... even though her birthday is in August. Or lately she has been saying, "Can I have that on my Christmas list? I really want that... please...can I have it?" when she fully doesn't know how long Christmas is from now. But one thing is for certain, she wants us to be ready for when Christmas comes.

It is a little easier to get ready for something when you know the date and time it will happen. For example, I know I have a date and time to pick up Annika at college out in New York for Thanksgiving break. I can prepare for that trip. Clean her room... that we have taken over in her absence. Fill the car with gas. Plan for my absence at work. Map out the trip. And head out.

So how, then, should we prepare for something like the Day of the Lord... the second coming of Jesus... when Jesus himself in our Gospel for today says, "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."???

The answer to the question is really quite simple. We should live every day as if it is the one when the Lord is going to come back. How would that change things for you?

Martin Luther supposedly said it this way, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree today."

Luther would make the most of that day. He would find joy in planting that apple tree and possibly imagine future generations enjoying apple strudel, apple pie, and caramel apples.

What does being prepared to meet the Lord look like in our lessons for today? In our first lesson, the prophet Amos was hard on the

Israelites who were thinking the day of the Lord would be something to look forward to... a day of light. But Amos says it will be darkness for you unless they shape up. The Israelites were at the height of territorial expansion and national prosperity around 750-760 B.C. There was economic affluence and military security. Amos, a shepherd, was called by God to be a prophet... to preach harsh words in a smooth season. He called out their injustices and their practice of calculating false balances when selling things, immorality, and shallow, meaningless piety of the Israelites... calling them to National repentance.

So, one way to get ready for the Day of the Lord, is practice daily repentance and make your faith an active part of your work, home, and public life. Your faith shouldn't be just a Sunday thing, but a daily thing. Amos says, God does not take delight in empty worship practices... but in things like justice and righteousness. Amos says, "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." So to Amos, our faith should be an everyday, active occurrence... like an ever flowing stream.

In our second lesson from 1st Thessalonians, waiting for the Lord should be a hopeful thing. Our faith in Jesus Christ and our Baptism into his death and resurrection should give us hope in the promise of eternal life. Those who die in the faith are promised the same journey Jesus took from death into life. So when we lose loved ones, Paul says we will grieve their loss, but we get to grieve with hope knowing they now rest in the promises of their faith in Jesus.

Finally in our Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the 10 Bridesmaids about the need to be prepared for his coming again at all times. The bridesmaids are waiting at the groom's house to be invited to the wedding banquet after the bride and groom consummate their marriage. But there was a delay in the bridegroom's return. Any number of things could happen on your wedding night that cause a delay. This delay is symbolic of the delay we are now experiencing as we wait for Jesus to return. In the story, all the bridesmaids fell asleep. The five wise bridesmaids brought an extra flask of oil for this occasion... in case there was a delay. The foolish bridesmaids did

not. They ran out of oil and wanted to borrow some but were told no... this is something you need to get for yourself... so they left.

Luther said the oil is our faith. You can't borrow someone else's faith, you have to come to it on your own... through the hearing the Gospel and the Holy Spirit working faith in you. Other scholars said the oil is faithful, active, obedient discipleship. This would go along with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, "to let your light so shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

So when the foolish bridesmaids left to get oil for themselves, the bridegroom returned and they were locked out of the wedding banquet. In other words, you can't time the market on Jesus' return or your own death... whichever comes first.

That means you have to be ready at all times. You need to take care of unfinished business now. You have to forgive who you need to forgive. Kiss your babies every day if you can. Stay in the Word which will increase your oil reserves. And use your spiritual gifts and faith to seek justice for the last, least, and lost.

This parable says there will be a judgement day. But Jesus is the judge. He is a gracious judge. He will judge you and me through the lens of our baptism and faith. The good news is in the warning to be ready to meet him. We still have time... at least in right now. Don't waste any days or think you have more time. Amen.