

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, 11/27/22

Text: Matthew 24:36-44.

“Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming! How do we get ready for his arrival?”

I went deer hunting up in Merrill last weekend. When I arrived at mom's house to say hi and put on my gear, I realized I forgot two important items. A blazed orange hat and a knife to gut out the deer. But I did find my dad's old hunting pack filled with everything I needed, and a lot of memories too. It also brought some grief knowing we won't be able to hunt together again.

Our Gospel for today is about being prepared for the time when Jesus comes again. And even though this has been delayed for 2000 years, **Jesus will come again**, but we are not certain when. Jesus even says no one knows about the day and hour of his return... no one except for the Father. So the question becomes, “So now what?” How do we live our lives as Christians knowing that Jesus could return any day? Martin Luther said if he knew this was his last day on earth, he would plant a tree. He would do something productive for the earth and its inhabitants.

During this season of Advent in the church, we are to prepare for the arrival of Christ... in the second coming, at Christmas, and among us now. How many of you either hosted guests this week, travelled, or went Christmas shopping? All of those take a lot of preparation and we often forget things or things don't always go as planned. I had to keep going to the store until I had everything I needed for Thanksgiving.

In our Gospel, Jesus says, you don't want to be those people in the days of Noah, who had no clue the flood was coming. They were unprepared. Sin got out of hand in the world so God decided to flood the earth and start again. Noah vaguely knew what was coming when God told him to build an ark. But even then, Noah had to step out in faith to actually build the Ark. This reminds me of the movie *Evan Almighty*, a modern take on Noah's Ark, as Steve Carrell, the Noah

character built an Ark in his suburb, while facing much gossip and ridicule from the neighbors. But he did it and a flood came.

Jesus is talking about a sudden or surprise arrival. We don't have unlimited time. The Gospel describes Jesus as a thief in the night. And that we are to keep awake.

Jesus says, so too will be the coming of the son of man.

What is Jesus getting at for us today? If you knew Jesus was coming tomorrow, would change the way you are living today? Is there anything you need to repent from? This is what the season of advent is for. It is a penitential season. It is a time for spiritual house cleaning. To return to God even though God never left you, but there are ways to be ready.

Jesus wants us to be prepared at all times to meet the Lord. To remain vigilant. To live with a heightened attentiveness to those around us. To live with kingdom eyes, ears, and values of loving the neighbor, of doing justice, of listening for God's voice in the midst of the cacophony of voices we could follow.

This also means we need to prepare each day as if it could be our last. The delay of Jesus' return makes me think of my own death, which more than likely will come first. What unfinished business do you have? Who do you need to say I love you to? Who do you need to thank? Who do you need to forgive? Let's practice.

But the good news is that we don't have to live in fear for this day of Jesus' return. We have the Paul Harvey version of the story. We know the rest of the story. We know that the cross and the resurrection have changed everything. Even though Jesus is telling us to keep awake or live with watchfulness... we are promised a future with hope through our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ.

As baptized children of God and believers, the promises of scripture are for us. We scriptures like John 3:16 and 17. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that all might be saved through him.

Our baptism is the armor of God to face the challenges of this world and the darkness.

So in the meantime, our Romans text for this week, which we did not read today lays out one way to be ready to meet Jesus. It says, “Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Maybe that’s what being prepared looks like. To live with integrity and kindness. To live our lives the same in public as we do in private. To avoid the desires of the flesh that hurt us and our loved ones.

In the meantime, there is grace for you and me. Jesus does come among us in word and sacrament. He wants us to not miss opportunities to be ready for that day when he comes again.

Amen!