

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
First Sunday of Advent - Year A
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:36-44
11/27/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the disciples,] 36“About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 42Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Soon!

Good morning! As I drove along the road heading towards West Virginia I was excited and nervous. Abby, my brother's wife, had been told at her doctor's appointment that she was due to give birth to the twins any day, maybe even that evening. Her appointment had been on a Monday, and I was on the road first thing Tuesday morning. I got to my parents house and only slightly unpacked, knowing that I would need to take my stuff to my brother's house when she went into labor and I was watching my niece Isla.

By that evening nothing had changed, so I went to bed with my phone off of vibrate, and no white noise machine to lull me to sleep in case they called during the night. The next day I packed up my uncle "go" bag and kept it by the door. Thursday came and went, no twins. Then the same thing on Friday... and Saturday too. By Sunday I was beginning to think that by the time I drove home on Wednesday I might not get to see the little guys! We had established a pattern where I would come up to my brother's house every evening for dinner. Sunday afternoon I decided to make a stop at the store before I went up, and it was then that I got the call... come on up! They needed to go! I stood in the store unsure of what to do. But by the time I got to my brother's house I realized I had been caught off guard, and I had forgotten my "go" bag, lulled into a false sense of security!

But that's the way with births, just when you think you're ready, things change and you are forced to pivot. Just when you think you know what's going to happen, you're caught off guard. This is the same point that Jesus is trying to make in today's Gospel text, except instead of twins, it's

the Son of Man. No one knows, not even the Messiah! Jesus uses the flood story as an example, and one scholar points out that *“the point of the comparison between the days of Noah and the coming of the Son of Man is the unexpectedness of the crisis... So unexpected was the flood that people did not recognize it until it had already come upon them.”*¹

As we begin a new church year, Year A, where we stick primarily to the Gospel of Matthew, we begin with the season of Advent. In the secular world, it's Christmas time, but the very meaning of Advent is that it's a time of expectation. It marks that moment right before a change. It's that moment at the very top of a roller coaster where it seems to stop right before it starts to rush down. It's as if we all hold our breath, wondering what will happen next. That's Advent.

Even in the church, the season tends to be focused solely on the birth of Jesus. But it's about more than just the birth of our savior... it's about his return. You see, Jesus had been telling everyone after his resurrection that he would be coming back, that he would return. And so when the early church was trying to figure things out, they all assumed that Jesus would be back very soon! By the time we get to Paul's missionary work, expectation was at an all time/fever pitch high. By then, Jesus was late, he should have been here YESTERDAY!

That's why we get the advice we read in our Second Reading from Romans. *“11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near.”*² St. Paul writes. His advice is more than just spiritual, it's practical. Because

¹ Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 342.

² Romans 13:11-12a NRSV

they thought Jesus was coming back soon, some felt that there was no reason for marriage. Others had fallen off the wagon, so Paul reminds them to remain faithful, to return to the Lord.

But now we need to take a short pause and talk about the “rapture.” I’m sure you’ve heard of this supposed event, most likely from more fundamental non-denominational Christian groups. Unfortunately, that language of the “rapture” is only in I Thessalonians. (4:17) As my main man Douglas R.A. Hare points out, “*a very different verb is used; the word here translated ‘taken’ normally means ‘receive’; those who are ready are received into the Messiah’s kingdom.*”³ It’s less of a “taken up bodily into the air,” and more of a “come on in!” as you greet someone at the door.

So, what do we do? What’s the point? It seems that regardless of what we do, no matter how prepared or ready we think we might be, we don’t know when the return will happen. I think that here in the 21st Century we have the opposite problem from believers 2,000 years ago. Where they thought Jesus would be back any second now, we act as if Jesus won’t ever come back. That’s why Advent is about the birth of a child, not the return of an adult. I’m not saying that one is more appropriate than the other, but that it really is a time where we lift up both truths.

We also remember and put into practice another important lesson. We live our lives in a way that brings honor and respect to God. I spend a bit of time in circles that are secular. I am constantly amazed at the horror stories that people share regarding their experience in the church. No wonder they left, I would too. From priests refusing end of life care because of giving to pastors who seem to stand only for hate. These are not the

³ Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 282.

examples that God calls us to be for the world. As the prophet Isaiah and Apostle Paul say, we are called to be something different. *“2In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. 3Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’”*⁴ And in Romans: *“12the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*⁵ So... in this season of Advent, this time of expectation, let us be better, let us be what God has called us to show forth, a shining light, a beacon of hope. Amen.

⁴ Isaiah 2:2-3a NRSV

⁵ Romans 12-14 NRSV