

First Sunday in Advent
December 1, 2013
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 24:37-44

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

A story is told that Satan once called together all the demons in hell and said he wanted to send one of them to earth. He wanted to send one of them with a message they would use to destroy and devour souls. He asked, "Which of you want to go?" One creature came forward and said, "I will go." Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell the children of men that there is no heaven." Satan said, "Only a few foolish will believe you, for there is a longing for heaven in every human heart." Then another came forward, darker and fouler than the first. Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hell." Satan looked at him and said, "Oh, no; most will not believe you, for in every human heart there's a thing called conscience that tells everyone they are liable to God for punishment." Then one last creature came forward, this one from the darkest place of all. Satan said to him, "And if I send you, what will you say to women and men to aid them in the destruction of their souls?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hurry." Satan quickly commanded, "Go!"

Satan wants us to believe that there is no hurry, that there is plenty of time to concern ourselves with things eternal. He keeps whispering to us that God, His Word, church, and our spiritual priorities can be set aside for another day. One of the devil's biggest lies is to tell us that the here and now is what is really important. That's why we need these words and other similar words from Jesus. Jesus tells us now is the day of salvation! Jesus teaches us to work while it is day, and to go while the fields are ripe for harvest. He says now is the day to make sure our own house is in order. As we focus today on the day Jesus will come again, a day coming that not even the angels know, I pray we hear this message loud and clear: **You must be ready now for Jesus' coming!**

Wars and rumors of war are a sign that it is coming. Every tornado, earthquake, or other natural disaster give us a reminder that it is on the way. False teachings, persecution, and even the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth all are signs that our eyes are to be open for Jesus' coming again. But sadly many ignore these signs about the coming of the Last Day. Jesus says, "*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating*

and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.

Why did the people during the days of Noah know nothing about what would happen to them? It wasn't because God didn't warn them. The truth is God patiently gave them an extra 120 years before He sent the flood. Noah told them about the coming judgment. They had to see the big ark he was busy building. So why didn't they know what was coming? They were too preoccupied with everything else - living as they always did, eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage. They were too busy following the evil inclinations of their hearts which were "***only evil all the time***" (Genesis 6). They had no time for God, or His Word & promises. Their lives were too busy. So the flood came & they were swept away in judgment. Jesus says, "***That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.***" People will be no more ready for Jesus than they were for the flood. Jesus will come like a thief in the night, at an hour "***when you do not expect him.***" All those who are not ready will be swept away in judgment.

So what does this mean for us? It means we need to be ready now, not later. We are to be looking for Jesus to come back today, not tomorrow. It means if we have sins to repent of it is not wise to put them off for another day. It is foolish to think we have plenty of time to go about satisfying our own sinful desires now, ignoring God's commands for awhile, because there will be time to do the God thing later. As James writes, "***Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.***" (4) Jesus wants us to be ready for Him to come now! So what is the best way to get ready? You are doing it right now, at least those of you who are awake and listening to the sermon. God prepares us through His Word. He strengthens our faith in Jesus as our Savior through this Word and through this sacrament. So of all the preparations we make for the Christmas season what could be more important than spending time in Jesus' Word?

Did you brave the rush this last Friday, which has now famously become known as black Friday (although many now can't even wait for Friday so they start on Thursday)? I drove by a few places and the parking lots were jam packed. I heard stories about pushing and shoving to get first in line. People got in fist fights because they wanted to get the things important to them. It made me really think. Today, it is the first Sunday in Advent, the season we prepare for Christ's coming. Did you have trouble finding a parking spot? Was it a mad rush to get into church today? Did you have to fight off other people to get a seat in here, maybe even a front seat this morning? As it the days of Noah, huh! People are still eating and drinking buying and selling, busy with everything else. So what does this say about priorities? What does this remind us about even our priorities? What is the real way to get ready for Christmas? What is the real way to be ready for when Jesus comes again?

For when Jesus comes again like a thief in the night He wants us to be watching. Jesus says, "***You also must be ready.***" This will be the reality: "***Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.***" Luke's Gospel adds "***on that night two people will be sleeping in one bed; one will be taken and the other left***" (Luke 17). The lines will be drawn for all eternity when Jesus returns. Every person will be judged. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Those who do not believe will be

condemned. Those who put their faith in Jesus will be taken to eternal life, those who did not will be left for everlasting punishment.

These words have always struck me. It could be two friends – now divided forever. There will be husbands and wives on opposite sides. It could be co-workers where one is heading for heaven and the other for hell. So the question becomes who is ready? Are they ready now? If the answer is no, then the question becomes what should we do. Don't let a day pass by when they are not in your prayers. Don't wait or hesitate to tell others the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Today, not tomorrow is the time to follow the example of the disciple Philip and invite others to come and see. Invite them to church with you to come see Jesus and what He has done for them.

For this is what the season of Advent is all about, isn't it? This season of preparation has us looking at the great thing God has done for us in the manger at Bethlehem. God is preparing our hearts once again to celebrate the fact that He sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. Jesus is preparing us for His coming again by pointing us to the cross where He paid the price for all our backward priorities and our every other sin. Jesus keeps preparing us for our death by showing us His empty tomb. God keeps teaching us the truth that without Jesus' first coming, His second coming would be a dreadful day for us. But because of Jesus' coming for us, now it will be the day of our redemption. Today, Jesus gives us a much needed reminder to be ready. Jesus is coming again. Don't let Satan trick us into thinking there is no hurry. Now is the day of salvation! Amen.