

Don't Miss the Boat
Matthew 24:36-44
November 27, 2016

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 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.”

Grace, mercy, and peace from our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the Advent which was – and is the Lord of the Advent which is to come.

On this first Sunday in Advent, we are going to look not at the first Advent of our Lord, but at his second Advent. When so many people are looking back for the babe who came in the manger, we are going to look forward to the Lord who is coming in the clouds. While it's good to look back and remember how our Savior came the first time to redeem us from our sins, we must never think that Bethlehem was the end of the story.

The word Advent comes from two Latin words *ad venire* which mean to come. The first Advent of Christ was some 2000 years ago and it was a monumentally important event. God had kept his promise. God had sent his Messiah. The long wait was over. The shroud of sin, which had hung over the human race since Adam and Eve, was soon to be lifted. The light of the world had come into the world. God, himself, had stepped from the eternal to the temporal to save his people.

However, there will be a second Advent of Christ. The same Almighty Son of God, the same second person of the Trinity, who traded the timelessness of Heaven for our time-bound earth to free us from sin, will make that trip again to free us from time itself. And it is this second Advent of our Lord that is the topic of today's Gospel reading.

In today's reading, to answer the disciples' questions about the last days, Jesus uses the story of Noah to describe the final times. And this message is a warning from Jesus to believers not unbelievers. But we shouldn't misunderstand these warnings from our Savior. Jesus doesn't warn us about things because he's mean and nasty. Jesus holds up these caution signs for our lives because he loves us and wants us to spend eternity with him.

In the reading, Jesus tells his disciples, including us, to keep watch. And there are three points, or three things that we should be keeping an eye on so they don't creep

unnoticed into our lives.

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. Mt 24:37-39

Warning number one: watch out for indifference. Did you notice that the things the people were doing aren't necessarily sinful? They were eating and drinking but this could be nothing more than going to parties. They were marrying and giving in marriage and there's nothing wrong with getting married and going to weddings. So what was the problem?

Their problem was indifference. We're told they didn't know what would happen until the end. But, wait a minute. How about this guy down the block who was building the Queen Mary in his back yard? Are we to believe that all those people were oblivious to someone building a boat in the desert? Not a boat – a ship. This thing was one and one-half football fields long, 75 feet wide, and as tall as a four-story building.

Now something that size and that unusual is bound to draw some attention. And when you catch people's attention you usually get questions. The people of Noah's time had to ask him what was going on. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that Noah was a righteous man. Given that, don't you suppose Noah told the people that God had had it with them and was about to wipe them out? Of course, he did. And can't you just hear the people saying, "This guy should be on medication."

They were indifferent. We aren't told that those people actively hated God. They just ignored God. They were so busy with their lives they didn't have time for God. They had parties and weddings to go to. They had jobs to work, and families to take care of. They were busy people with busy lives. They just didn't have enough time left to squeeze in God.

The opposite of love isn't hate – it's indifference. You can't love God and be indifferent to him at the same time.

Back to the reading: *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* (Mt 24:40-41).

The warning here is against the sin of unbelief. We see two examples of people doing the same things. This would suppose that these people were basically the same. So what makes the difference on who is taken away and who is left behind?

When you're speaking in spiritual terms, as Jesus is here, the only difference is faith. When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, the only criteria for judgment will be faith. Either you have faith or you don't. Either you will remain or you will be swept away.

But you say, “Wait a minute, Pastor. I have faith.” And I reply, “Good for you. Praise the Lord.” But remember, Jesus is talking to his followers, not unbelievers. This warning is not to get faith, but to hang on to the faith you already have. Jesus is warning to treat your faith with care and respect. Take care of your faith. Feed it with regular Bible study and regular worship. Strengthen your faith by witnessing to it. Share your faith and watch it grow. Exercise your faith by living out what you believe. And listen only to your Master. Ignore Satan, the world, and your own sinful flesh; all of whom will try to sow seeds of unbelief in your heart.

Our last warning is don't get careless: *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* (Mt 24:42-44).

Jesus told many parables about the unexpectedness of the Last Day. We have the parable of the Ten Virgins with their oil lamps, the parable of the Ten Talents, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats. And here, in today's reading, we hear the same warning – don't become careless. It's an interesting word, careless. It literally means what it says – to care less – to not have concern for. We must not lose our concern for the Last Day.

Every year, people all over the world stop to consider the first Advent of Christ. How many of those people do you think put that much emphasis on Christ's second Advent? When Jesus came to earth the first time, it signaled the fulfillment of God's promise to save mankind. When Jesus makes his second appearance on this earth, the judgment of all people will take place. Tell me, do you think the second Advent is any less important than the first?

It's easy for us to get sidetracked and fail to consider what the second coming will bring. It's easy for us to fall into thinking that we have lots of time – that Christ won't be back for a long time. Jesus knows that. That's why he issued this third warning to his people. That's why he stopped to say, “*Keep watch. You don't know when I'm coming to you or when you're coming to me. Live every day as though this is the day we will meet face to face.*”

At the beginning of this message I said that Jesus didn't leave us these warnings because he is mean but because he loves us? Let me tell you how I know that's true. I want you to leave here knowing for sure that Jesus loves you.

Try to picture in your mind how wonderful Heaven must be. A place with no sickness, no hate, no poverty, no death. A place of complete, timeless happiness. A place that left the apostle John so awe-struck the best he could do was to say the streets were paved with pure gold. A place so wonderful it defies human description. Have you got the picture in your mind? That's the place Jesus left to come here for you and me and be born in a stable.

Next, picture a life where no one understands you. An entire life where only a handful of people like you, and the rest of the people, for the most part, actively hate you. A life where you have to keep one eye over your shoulder at all times because someone is always after you to do you harm. A life where thousands of people are only interested in what they could get out of you. Oh, yes, one last thing, in the midst of all this, a life where you must live a perfect life. That's the life Jesus lived on this earth for you and me.

Now picture this. Picture being crucified. Picture having spikes driven through your wrists and feet. Picture being suspended on a cross. Picture the pain that every breath would bring as you push yourself up to inhale. Picture suffocating to death. That's the death Jesus died for you and me so that he might provide the perfect sin sacrifice that God's righteousness demanded.

The next time, and every time, you hear or read a passage like today's Gospel reading, don't say to yourself, "Oh, no, here comes some more do's and don'ts." Instead, listen closely, study the text, and say, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you for caring enough about me to warn me so I don't miss the boat. Thank you for coming, thank you for living, thank you for dying, thank you for rising from the dead, thank you for coming again. And most of all, thank you for loving me."