

Sermon for November 27, 2016 – Advent 1

Matthew 24:36-44 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: Be Alert . . .

- 1) *Against indifference*
- 2) *Against unbelief*
- 3) *Against carelessness*

³⁶“No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns. ³⁸In fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. ³⁹And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man returns. ⁴⁰“At that time two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²So be alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴You also need to be ready for this reason: The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.”

The leaves have fallen off the trees and the days are much shorter and colder – all of which signals a change in the seasons. Even though there isn’t any accumulating snow in the forecast we all know that a freak winter storm could pop up at any time. Massive snow storms are coming, we just don’t know when. So have you gotten your house, yard, vehicles and self prepared for winter yet?

Let me ask you another question: are you prepared for Christ’s return. Like the change of the seasons, we are surrounded by the signs of his coming. Like a freak, winter storm, his coming will be sudden and shocking. Are you prepared for it, or are you waiting until the last minute to try to “beat the storm”? The problem with waiting until the last minute is that, more likely than not, you will be caught unprepared.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you do not want to be caught unprepared at Christ’s return. The consequences are eternally devastating. This is why Jesus urges us to **be Alert . . .** 1) *Against indifference.* 2) *Against unbelief.* 3) *Against carelessness.*

Part One: Against indifference.

Our sermon text is part of a larger discourse Jesus gave his disciples concerning both the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. After describing the signs of his second

coming – and encouraging us to interpret them as we would interpret the seasonal signs of nature – Jesus goes on to say:

³⁶*“No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father.*

Just as no one can accurately predict when a tornado will form or exactly where it will strike, so no one can accurately predict when Christ will come. It is foolish to even try. All we have are the signs that this storm is coming. Every moment that passes is a moment that brings us closer to the end.

Jesus says: ³⁷*Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns.*

What were the days of Noah like before the flood? Genesis 6 describes the earth as being wicked. Believers married unbelievers resulting in a great falling away from faith in God. People did whatever they wanted to do with no regrets. They refused to repent of their sins and turn back to the LORD.

Does any of this sound familiar? Our society is growing ever more intolerant of the Gospel. It either ignores what the Bible says about sin or mocks it. People follow their own unbridled passions – doing everything they can to twist, change or destroy God’s Word. And many Christians – especially the young and inexperienced - are falling away. Doesn’t today’s world sound a lot like Noah’s?

Noah, being a man of faith, did all he could to confess the truth – calling the people of his age to repentance and faith! And how did his world receive his urgent, heartfelt warnings? Jesus tells us:

³⁸*In fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. ³⁹And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away.*

In other words, people ignored Noah’s warning. They just continued going about their daily lives without making any changes. They met Noah’s preaching with cold indifference – refusing to either repent or acknowledge that anything was wrong until it was too late.

Jesus says: *That is how it will be when the Son of Man returns.* Most people will just go about their daily lives as if there was nothing to be concerned about at all.

And doesn’t that sound like the world we live in today? The people of this world don’t seem to care what the Bible says about their sins and need for forgiveness. They often meet Christianity’s loving call to repentance with cold indifference. They just want to live their lives without anyone or anything making them feel guilty for the choices they make.

But what about you: do you care what God says about sin and that, according to his law, you deserve his eternal wrath and punishment? Do you care that Jesus loved you so much that he

died for your sins on the cross so that you might be forgiven? Do you care that God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to work repentance in your heart so that, having received the forgiveness Jesus won for you through faith, you might become a child of God and heir of heaven? Do you care that Christ will soon return to both judge the world for its wickedness and deliver believers to eternal life with him in paradise? I sure hope you care about these things: for they are the very teachings through which Christ prepares us for his return.

Be alert against indifference towards the Gospel. Spend time in God's Word reflecting on both your need for forgiveness and the lengths Jesus went through to save you. By doing this your faith in Christ will increase and you will be prepared to receive Jesus when the end actually comes.

Part Two: Against unbelief

Jesus continues: ⁴⁰*“At that time two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.*

Can you tell the difference between a believer and an unbeliever just by looking at them? I certainly can't; but Christ can. And he will reveal this distinction when He comes again on the last day.

Two men are in the field. Outwardly they look the same. Both seem morally upright. On the Last Day, however, only one of them will be taken to God's side. The other will be left for judgment. Why? Because one believed and the other didn't.

Two women are grinding at the mill. To our human eyes these women are equal: the one seems just as righteous as the other. But only one of them is received by God. Why? Because only the one had faith.

“So be alert,” Jesus says, *“because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”* What should we be looking out for? The unbelief that so easily creeps into a person's heart and corrupts it.

“But pastor,” someone might say, “you don't have to worry about me. I'm a member of your church. Doesn't this fact prove that I'm a believer?” Oh, how I wish that were true! Sadly it doesn't: a person can easily be an active, lifelong member of a church and still not believe! Want proof? Look no further than Jesus' handpicked disciples. Were all 12 of them believers? Judas sure wasn't. Could the other disciples tell that he was not a believer before his betrayal? No they couldn't. Why not? Because, humanly speaking, he was just like the other disciples. He heard the same sermons they heard and followed Jesus just like they did. He engaged in the same ministry they engaged in. He gave nobody any reason to suspect that he was anything but a disciple of Christ. But Jesus knew the truth. He saw into Judas' heart.

This, then, is the point of Jesus' illustration of the two men in the field and two women at the mill: we can't tell who is or isn't a believer. Only God knows those who are is.

Now, Jesus did not tell us these things so that we can look around our church wondering who is and isn't a believer. To do so would be foolish and wrong. Rather, having heard His warning, God wants *you* to examine your own hearts. What do *you* believe about Christ? Do *you* confess that you are sinful and need a Savior? Do *you* trust that Jesus is the divine Savior God sent to save you from your sins? Do *you* truly repent of your sins trusting that God forgives you for Christ's sake?

By asking ourselves these kinds of questions we can examine ourselves and address any unbelief lurking within our hearts. And why would we want to do that? Because unbelief is like a cancer: left unchecked, it can spread and destroy a person. Thankfully the Gospel remedies this kind of spiritual cancer – keeping our faith alive as we patiently wait for Christ's return.

Part Three: Against carelessness

Jesus continues: ⁴³*But understand this: If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house to be broken into.* ⁴⁴*You also need to be ready for this reason: The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.*"

I can really relate to Jesus' illustration. When I first became a pastor, I lived a couple miles away from the Church I served in Milwaukee. I had to pick up my Mom from the airport one Saturday night. We got home very late and, after getting my Mom settled, I immediately got ready for bed. On my way to bed, my Mom asked me: "Did you put the Club on the car?" (You remember the Club, don't you? It was a large, locking device you put on the steering wheel to keep a car from getting stolen.) "No, I forgot," I said. "You better do it," my Mom warned. "It's really, really late and I'm all ready for bed," I replied, "Besides, the car is parked on a busy street right in front of my house. No one will steal it tonight."

When I got up for church the next morning, guess what I saw when I looked out my front window? A pile of broken glass where my car used to be only a few hours earlier!

"It won't happen to me tonight. . ." those are some famous last words! I had faithfully put my club on my car every single night up until the night it got stolen. One act of false security and carelessness cost me my car. Don't let it cost you your salvation!

What I mean is this: Jesus tells us that his coming will be like that of a thief's: sudden and when we least expect it. Therefore don't be careless with your salvation. Don't live in sin, thinking you have time to repent of your guilty pleasures. Do not be careless with the Gospel, treating your relationship with God as something you'll take more seriously later on, after you get your life set up the way you want it to be set up.

Jesus said he's coming soon - like a thief, when we least expect it. The signs heralding his return have all been fulfilled. Every tick of the second hand is a tick closer to our Savior's coming.

Don't be caught unprepared for his arrival – living in unrepented sin and unbelief. All who live like that will be cursed to the eternal fires of hell together with the devil and all his evil angels.

However, all who – through repentance and faith – look to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins will be saved. Christ's return will be a blessing for them, because they will be welcomed to His side to live with him in the perfect paradise he has prepared for them from before the creation of the world.

Please understand that the LORD takes no pleasure in the eternal destruction of anyone. He wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. This is why he sent Jesus to suffer and die for the sins of the world. This is why he sends out pastors, missionaries and other faithful Christian evangelists: so people might repent of their sins, believe in him and be saved.

So, stay spiritually alert – always prepared for Christ's return. Then the day of Jesus' second coming will not be a day to fear, but a day to look forward to with joy because you will know that when Jesus comes again, he is coming with the eternal reward he won for you on his cross. Amen.