

First Sunday of Advent – November 27, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 24:37-44 (NIV)

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38) 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; 39) 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. 40) Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41) Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 42) "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43) 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. 44) So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Dear friends in Christ:

Perhaps some of you saw this weather graphic on TV last weekend. Although winter doesn't officially begin for a few more weeks, the opening weekend of deer hunting saw a nice snow cover in our area on a week ago this past Saturday. You can be sure that there will be more weather maps like this in the coming months – maps filled with winter weather advisories, watches and warnings.

Here's a handy little explanation of the meaning of some of those weather terms.

Advisories: Be Aware

Watches: Be Prepared

Warnings: Take Action!

Advisories are issued when events are expected to remain below the warning criteria, but still cause significant inconvenience. Advisories are most commonly issued in association with snow events.

A Watch tells you that conditions are favorable and there is a pretty good chance that the event may happen. When a watch is issued begin making preparations for the upcoming event. Listen to your local media to know when warnings are issued. Watches are intended to heighten public awareness of the situation.

*A warning means that a certain weather event is **IMMINENT**. Measures should be taken to safeguard life and property **IMMEDIATELY**.*

In our text Jesus issues a watch regarding his return. Unlike a weather watch which simply says that there's a pretty good chance that snow will come (leaving questions in our minds) there is no doubt that Jesus will come again – **That day will come just as certainly as the flood came in the days of Noah.** The only question is when it will happen. In our text Jesus tells us as his disciples to

Theme: Keep Watching for the Lord's Coming

1. Don't become pre-occupied with the affairs of this life
2. Don't let down your guard

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In the early verses of Matthew 24 Jesus told his disciples that temple buildings would be destroyed. When Jesus and his disciples arrived at the Mount of Olives – they asked him privately: **“When will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”** (Matthew 24:3 NIV)

Although the disciples made an immediate connection between the destruction of the temple and the Lord's return, the two events would be separated by thousands of years. In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke both of signs of his coming at the end of time and of signs indicating that the destruction of the temple would be at hand.

Speaking about the time of his return Jesus made this comment to introduce the words of our text: **"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36 NIV) Jesus speaking about the unexpected nature of his coming and warns us to be on the watch and to be ready.

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38) 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; 39) 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. 40) Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41) Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 42) "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. With these words, Jesus is saying: "Don't become pre-occupied with the affairs of this life."

The days of Noah were godless days. In fact, sin and corruption, violence and evil had become so great that God had decided to destroy the earth and its inhabitants. God warned Noah of this impending destruction and gave him plans to build an ark, which would allow his family and groups of animals to float in safety on the waters God would use to destroy the earth and its evil inhabitants.

Although Noah became a preacher of righteousness to his generation – his friends and neighbors were too busy with business as usual to pay attention. Notice Jesus didn't call attention to any flagrant or terrible sins as he described the people who were taken away in the flood. He simply described them as being too pre-occupied with their daily lives to pay attention to what was going to happen when the great flood came. They were busy eating and drinking (the words don't seem to have any particular suggestion of partying or over indulgence). They were getting married and they were marrying off their children – everything was going along just as usual when suddenly ***on the seventeenth day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened.*** (Genesis 7:11 NIV) and **the flood came and took them all away.**

That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man – at the time of our Lord's return. Just as the people at the time of Noah were too involved with their worldly affairs to pay attention to spiritual matters, so it will be in the days before the Lord's return. Just as people scoffed at Noah and his ark and his words of warning so people in the end times will laugh at the prospect of his return saying: (2 Peter 3:4 NIV) **"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."**

Before the Lord's return, the majority of people will act as though there is nothing more important than the day-to-day routine of life. Up to the very moment of the Lord's return, they will pay no attention to the fact the Lord came in grace to save them. They will also pay no attention to the fact that he will come again in glory to judge them; until he comes – but alas then it will be too late because the act of judgment will have already begun. As Jesus said: **Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41) Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.**

During this lifetime believers and unbelievers often stand side-by-side in their activities and work. They may stand side-by-side in the same household. As believers, we may have any number of unbelieving

acquaintances – relatives or neighbors, classmates at school, co-workers, or business associates but on the Day of Judgment; our contact and dealings with them will come to end. The believers will be taken to be with the Lord and to the eternal joys of heaven, while the unbelievers will be left by the Lord – abandoned by him, eternally separated from him with no chance to escape eternal judgment just as there was no escape for the unbelievers at the time of Noah. There will be no second chance for those who are not taken to be with the Lord. They will be sent away to eternal punishment.

Because these things are so – that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly and that it will be a day of separation and judgment Jesus calls on his disciples to keep on watching: **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”**

But what is it that we are to watch? A weather watch encourages us to make preparations so that we aren’t caught by surprise when a storm hits. So we might head out to the stores to pick up a few extra necessities so that we won’t be caught short. When the Lord Jesus tells us to be watching – he also wants us to make preparations so that we won’t be caught by surprise on the day of his return. He is telling us to be careful that we don’t become so pre-occupied with the affairs of this life that we have no time to seek his kingdom and his righteousness. He’s telling us to be sure that we take time to feed our faith with his Word and with his Sacrament. He’s telling us to live in readiness for his return – confident that it will be the day of our deliverance. He’s warning, “don’t be lulled into complacency as the masses were in the time of Noah.” Don’t let down your guard as the owner of the household did in the situation which Jesus mentions next in our text.

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. 44) So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

When Jesus described the people at the time of Noah – he described them as a people who knew nothing about what would happen – they were ignorant of what was taking place, they were not watching, they had no understanding. Jesus does want his followers to end up in that same predicament and so he says to them: understand this. Take this to heart, make use of this knowledge: **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.** A homeowner would not knowingly allow his home to be broken into – in fact, if we become aware of suspicious activity in our neighborhoods or of other homes that have been broken into we would take extra steps to make sure our homes were secure. By being watchful and careful we may prevent our homes from being broken into – but if we let down our guard and become careless – that’s when we may become a victim of a crime.

The homeowner who is not ever watchful and who becomes a victim of crime will learn when it is too late that he should have been more careful. Jesus warns us not to let our guard down – to grow weary and tired while we are waiting for his return. He warns us not to grow careless with our faith and life. He warns us not to be deceived into thinking we’ll have plenty of time in the future to pay attention to spiritual matters. He encourages us to be ready. We’re ready for a snow storm when we’ve picked up those extra household necessities – an extra gallon of milk, another loaf of bread, when we’ve made sure the snow blower is ready and set to go or the shovel is in its proper place. When we’re ready then we can say: Let it snow.

We’re ready for the Lord’s return when we’re trusting in him as our Savior and looking eagerly for his return. We’re ready when we understand that we need his grace and forgiveness and when we are rejoicing that he provides it to us through faith in him. We’re ready when we’re watching our lives so that we don’t become pre-occupied with the affairs of this life or so that we don’t let our guard down. And, when we’re ready then we can say; come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.