

Matthew 24:36-44

"Ignorance and Readiness"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, who will come again to judge the living and the dead. Amen

Most often, when we think of the Season of Advent, we primarily focus on the anticipation of the first coming of Jesus, his birth. However, on the first Sunday of Advent each year, the focus is more about a possibly more important event in the life of Christ, his second coming, his return. We don't often preach sermons about this event and I'm sure we all would prefer watching a Christmas program put on by our kids rather than a program about what we have heard the rapture might look like. In today's gospel from Matthew, Jesus uses the story of Noah and the flood to teach us what his second coming will be like. There are many aspects of the story of Noah that are frightening. Not all images of the story of Noah are about animals calmly entering the ark two by two in an orderly fashion. The Lord didn't send the flood to preserve all the animals he had created. The Lord sent the flood to destroy people of the earth who had become so evil. However, Jesus does not refer to the days of Noah so that you fear his return. Jesus uses the story of Noah to remind you what is not for you to know and then how to be ready for his return.

The first thing that Jesus agrees that we should be ignorant about is knowing the day of his return. Jesus tells us that none of the angels have overheard the Lord talking about the day that Christ will return. Jesus says that he doesn't even know when he will return. Only his Father knows the day. I don't know how much clearer scripture could be about this point of his return, but many people have and continue to speculate that they have been a divine insight about this date. From 1878 to 1975 the Watchtower Society made at least 6 different unfulfilled predictions about the end of the age. The second lesson for today provides us with the best answer we can give about the timing of Christ's return. Paul declares, "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." Every day is one day closer and that is all we ever will know about the timing of when Christ will return.

Another similarity to the days of Noah and Christ's return is the day will be just most other days. Jesus never promises to give hints to some people that the rest of us might miss such as when a new millennium rolls over. Many of us here today remember going to sleep in the year 1999 and having breakfast as usual in the year 2000. Other false prophets have pointed to who is in political power as a sign of the end of times. Scripture tells us that there are signs of the end, but the signs are not the event. I often watch when the odometer in one of my vehicles rolls over to 100,000 miles. I sometimes stop and wait to see if something exciting might happen, but just as the signs about the end of times, it never has. The miles don't stop recording, they just keep adding up as usual.

There is a difference between how God had described the condition of the world at the time of Noah and how Jesus refers to it. Before the flood came, God noticed all the evil in the world and interestingly it was described in the same way that Jesus was described by religious leaders who wanted him put to death. Instead of simply saying that people were eating and drinking in the days of Noah, the Lord noticed the evil of people just as other's condemned Jesus by saying that he was a glutton and a drunkard because of the crowd he hung out with. Instead of marrying and giving in marriage, the world at the time of Noah was engaged in adultery and all types of sexual immorality just as Jesus was condemned for hanging out with prostitutes and eating with all types of sinners.

The days of Noah are like Jesus' return in that many doubted the day would come. They had never witnessed a rain turn into a devastating flood. People were not living each day as if it were there last. Jesus points out there is nothing that people will be doing differently when he returns. Jesus does not take the better farmer from the field and leave the one who was lazy. Jesus makes no distinction between the two women that are grinding grain at the mill. It isn't even real clear who Jesus takes and who he leaves behind.

Jesus did not refer to the days of Noah so that you would be left in fear wondering what side of the door of the ark you were on when God shut the door. Jesus said that the people knew nothing until the flood came, and so it will be when the Son of Man comes again. It will not be a change from what we don't know, our ignorance, to knowledge or our better understanding of his return that will signal Jesus to take us or leave us. The reason that Noah and his family were saved is the same reason that you will be saved. You have done nothing other than being chosen by God. Getting ready for Christ's return is not something you will need to do, but you will be made ready by Christ by hearing his promise of salvation for you.

The Psalmist tells how we are made ready for Christ's return when he said, "I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord." This is the place where fear about Christ's return is removed and is replaced with certainty by hearing his promise of salvation for you. Each time that you and I come to the house of the Lord, it is as if we enter an ark where Jesus forgives our sinfulness and shuts the door to the power of the devil to question our salvation. The Lord chose Noah and his family to be saved from the waters of the flood. The Lord has chosen you through the flood waters of holy baptism to save you and it is good for us to come into the house of the Lord to hear this good news as you have today. Maybe we should have a few more Sundays of the year when we talk about the second coming of Christ. On the other hand, there really isn't much for you to know. You don't need to know when Jesus is returning. You don't need to know what the day will look like. You don't need to be afraid of what you are doing when Jesus returns. Your ignorance or knowledge about these matters won't matter. What you do need to know is professed by your lips each time you confess your faith with the words of the Apostles' Creed. Those words have been capitalized on the screen today. All you need to know is that HE WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. Jesus will return again, and you have once again been made ready by hearing that Christ has chosen you and forgiven you and gives you eternal life. Amen.