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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 27, 2016
1st Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14
Hymns: 68; 606; 64; 611:7 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:37-44

37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the
Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were
eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day
that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood
came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of
Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken
and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one
will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not
know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the
master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he
would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.
44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an
hour you do not expect. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: A loaded question.

Sometimes in Bible class someone asks a fairly straightforward
question and I manage to go on and on with an answer that is way

longer than necessary to answer the question. One might think that was what happened with Jesus and His disciples on the occasion when Jesus presented the words of our text. You see this is but a very small portion of Jesus' response to the disciples' questions **“Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”** (Matthew 24:3)

No, Jesus didn't get carried away with His answer the way I sometimes do. He presented the answer the disciples needed to hear in response to what was actually a loaded question. So Jesus taught a series of truths in answer to the double question of the disciples that really addressed two separate events, first, the destruction of Jerusalem, and then later, Jesus' return in judgment. One of Jesus' lessons concerning His return in glory concerned the --

THEME: Implications of the Sudden Nature of Jesus' Second Coming!

The sudden nature of Jesus' coming is a fact that we have got to comprehend. It will be sudden!. There won't be a great deal of warning leading up to the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. No more than we have given us already in the Scriptures. That is why we need to pay attention and understand exactly what it is that Jesus is teaching in these and other presentations on the coming of the last day. Ok, so we know that the Day of the Lord's return will be sudden; so what does that mean for me as far as how I live my life? There are certain implications tied to this fact should encourage us to be and stay ready and well prepared for the Lord's return. The first implication to this is that --

I. Sudden Means Life Goes On.

Just because people are not focusing on a coming judgment doesn't mean that it isn't coming.

Matthew 24:37-39 “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not

know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

In the days of Noah there was a definite time frame given. It would be 120 years from the time that the Lord had said “enough of this wickedness” until the day the flood began. We are told that not only was Noah busy building the ark during that time, which in itself was a continuous reminder and message regarding the judgment to come, but he was also a preacher of righteousness. Noah was vocal about why he was building the ark. Noah was doing the work of a prophet, calling people to repentance, warning them of the judgment to come.

So what happened? Did people stop what they were doing? Did life grind to a halt? Were people in despair over their sin and the impending judgment? No, not at all! People didn’t pay serious attention to Noah, and what he was doing, and why he was doing it, or to what he had to say. Life went on just as it had before the Lord declared that the flood would come. People kept on having meals, and parties, and weddings, right up to the day that the flood came.

Jesus tells us that **they did not know** until the flood came and took them all away. One might ask, “How could they **not** know?” Because true knowledge requires that one believe. True knowledge requires that one understands that the Word of the Lord is true, and that what the Lord says shall come to pass. It’s not a joke, it is not simply words like a story or a fable. It is real, more real than life itself with all of its activities. And then it actually happened. **All of a sudden** the rains came and the fountains of the deep were opened up and the flood came and took them all away.

All of sudden it happens will be true of Jesus’ glorious return as well. All of sudden means that until it happens life in this world will just keep on going. There will be family dinners and parties. There will be weddings and funerals, and even Black Friday and Cyber-Monday sales. Life will go on that way for the world, and it will go on that way for the child of God as well. We will get up in the morning and head out to work or school. We will have chores to do, and “to do” lists to complete, and people to see, and

appointments to keep. And life will go on until **suddenly** it doesn't, because the Lord's return will come suddenly.

So what do we do? Do we stop doing? No, that's not the answer. What we do is make sure that we are not caught up in the illusion that it's not going to happen because everything around us keeps on going. We must NOT be like those who at the time of the flood **did not know**. We need to be like Noah and his family. We need to be preparing for that which the Lord assures us is coming so that when it suddenly comes we will be protected by the Lord and delivered from every evil.

You see it's not only that life will go on, but that --

II. Sudden Means No More Time to Repent

Matthew 24: 40-42 “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”

What is being described here? Again it relates to the suddenness of Jesus' return in judgment. Life will go on right up to the last minute. People will be working side by side, right alongside the same person that's been there for years. You work together as a team. You might have lunch together. Then suddenly Jesus returns, and one of the two is taken. Taken? Taken where? Is that bad? Taken to meet the Lord in the air, and no, that isn't bad. Indeed it is very, very good. Paul writes of this in his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Isn't that a marvelous description of the sudden nature of the Lord's coming? And it will be in such a fashion that no one on earth will miss it. All will see it together, but only one will be

taken, the other will be left. The Lord knows those who are His. The Lord will gather His people to Himself as He descends with a shout, and those who are taken in this manner will meet the Lord in the air. Now that is sudden stuff! What follows is simply amazing: **“we shall always be with the Lord!”** That is what Jesus was telling the disciples, answering their question about the end of the age.

However there is a flip side to this that one dare not forget. While one was taken, the one the Lord knew as His child and heir of salvation, there was also another left. The Lord’s coming is sudden and it is final. What is written in novels like “Left Behind” and depicted in the movies is fiction; that was a fairytale that said life went on and gave people second chances. When Jesus comes in His sudden appearing that is the end. Those left behind are left behind for the destruction that shall accompany the Lord’s coming in judgment. His sudden appearing means there will be no time to apologize, no time to repent, no more chances to change one’s heart and mind, as if one had the ability to do such a thing. Then every knee shall bow before the Lord, and those left behind at His sudden reappearing will be lost forever.

So what is the Lord’s lesson concerning the day of His coming? It will come suddenly upon believer and unbeliever alike. Indeed the person standing next to you at work may have a dramatically different experience and outcome than you do. So make your calling and election sure. Stay in the Word. Stay ready for the Lord’s coming. Don’t get caught up in the ways of the world with its vanity and sinful pleasures. Be the one who is taken, not the one who is left.

But wait, if that person standing next to you is at all, even the least bit important to you, if it be your mother, or your brother, or our friend, or even simply your co-worker who stands by your side at the factory, or sits at the desk next to yours, do we just let be unprepared as this comes upon them suddenly? Let us endeavor to make our lives a testimony to things spiritual, so that we are attentive to things spiritual, and people will notice that we are attentive to things spiritual, and that we are watching for the Lord’s coming. May it be our goal that we are the one taken, and so is that other person who stands next to us.

This calls for diligence. Jesus wanted to make it clear that --

III. Sudden Means One Needs to Constantly Watch.

Matthew 24:43-44 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The thief doesn't send out advance notice cards. He doesn't stay on a predictable schedule. He comes when he will. The homeowner can't rely on being notified ahead of time. The thief doesn't send out postcard reminders of his coming. If he did it would be a simple enough to be prepared. But that isn't the way it works. The thief comes at a time when he is not expected. So it will be with the sudden appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes He will not be expected. It will be a surprise, even a shock to most. They will be caught unprepared to meet Him.

Jesus would have us be ready. He is telling us that we need to be watchful all the time. When we sit down in Bible class and talk about it, then we think about His coming, but really during our normal activities how often does one think, "Jesus could be coming today, I should be ready." Tell me, how many of you gave it a thought on Thanksgiving Day? If you went out shopping Friday or yesterday, you were probably thinking a lot more about what to buy your mother or daughter for Christmas than you were thinking about the possibility that Jesus could return at any moment. That is true for all of us, and we daren't say, "Well I would be ready if I knew when it was going to happen?" Jesus told His disciples that even He, while in His state of humiliation, didn't know, but the Father only. And I say that it's a good thing I don't know when He will return because I am a terrible procrastinator, and the temptation to put off things spiritual would be too great if I knew Jesus return wasn't for another ten, or twelve, or twenty years. And then what would become of me? It is a blessing that we don't know that it will be sudden and unexpected.

Now that we know that we need to watchful always, and prepared for the Lord's appearing, we will encourage one another even as Paul did in our epistle lesson this morning telling us it was time to be awake spiritually and not live like the rest of the world. We have to take off the works of darkness, like taking off and throwing away a shabby, filthy old coat not fit for anyone to wear, and that we put on the armor of light, that armor of the gospel that is not only bright and shiny, but wards off the devil's arrows.

We just dare not get sloppy spiritually. When we start neglecting the Word and sacrament we are getting sloppy spiritually and we are walking a dangerous path. When we start walking on the broad and easy path that the world tells us is all good, we are getting sloppy spiritually. We can't buy into the world's idea of righteousness and innate goodness, and the idea that all will be saved in the end no matter what, we are getting sloppy spiritually. We could then get caught unprepared at the Lord's sudden appearing. From this preserve us dear Father in heaven.

And don't we all know people, people we love and care about that are just letting things spiritual slip. Give them a wakeup call. Remind them that "**our salvation is nearer than when we *first* believed.** ¹²**The night is far spent, the day is at hand**" (Romans 13:11-12). Watch. Be ready always and watch. Even if comes a hundred years after I die, I need to be ready, and it is right that I watch, for the Lord will come to call me even if it is not the end of the world.

Ok, so today is the first Sunday in Advent, and the Lord's coming is what Advent is all about. This is a special time of preparation for our celebration of Christmas. This lesson about the sudden final appearing of Jesus on the last day is important for us in preparation for Christmas, because Christmas, Jesus' first appearing, is what makes it possible for us to anticipate His sudden reappearing with joyful expectation. We want our loved ones to come home for Christmas that we might share the joy of our Savior's birth. As we share that joy we will also be ready for sharing an everlasting joy as we are together taken suddenly to ever be with the Lord.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)