

I.N.I.

Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost
November 24, 2013
Matthew 24:35-44

In Christ Jesus, our returning Savior, for whom we eagerly watch and faithfully await, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As many of you know the theme for the end of the church year is the end of the world. Sermon texts and Scripture readings focus on Jesus' second coming; the Judgment; the resurrection of the dead; eternal life in heaven... Well this morning is the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday we begin a new church year with the season of Advent.

And so in keeping with our Lutheran liturgical calendar our main thought for today is Jesus' second coming and the encouragement is to **WATCH!**

Jesus spoke about these truths concerning the future but they have direct application and practical importance to our present. These teachings concerning the End Times were given by Jesus for at least 2 reasons. For the unbeliever, the carnally secure person, the one who believes the world will never end, that this life is all there is to life and that we will not stand before God to be judged—these words of Jesus are a very strong warning of judgment—**TAKE HEED, LISTEN CAREFULLY, REPENT!**

For the believer in Jesus, the child of God who has repented of his sins and trusts in Jesus for his future these teachings are both an admonition, an encouragement, and a great comfort. An admonition against the danger of falling spiritually asleep as we are waiting; an encouragement to keep on watching; and also a source of comfort against the temporal temptations of this evil world.

As a child, it seemed to me, like the Christmas season would never get here, and once it did it seemed like Christmas Eve took forever to arrive. There was the anxious, eager anticipation of the tree, the decorations, the Advent services, the Christmas program to learn and of course the presents!

Well in much the same way, the believer in Christ should feel excitement as the Judgment approaches, as the End of the world comes closer. Does that sound strange? It shouldn't! Even as we prepare for Christmas, (Christ's first coming) with Advent services and a proper reflection on God's Word as well as getting out the decorations and getting a list of gifts to buy so also we as believers need to prepare ourselves for Jesus' second coming. We need to prepare our hearts for Christ's coming by searching His Word, daily repenting of our sins, trusting alone in Jesus' sacrifice for us, basking in His forgiving love and watching for His glorious return.

But we all have to admit, —that the excitement as another Christmas season approaches far exceeds the excitement as the end draws near. There are several reasons for that which we will be speaking about in this morning's sermon.

So we admit that we are not all that excited, but we should be. Our eternal future is at stake, our eternal life is involved. What will keep us excited? Our text this morning says we need to remain **WATCHFUL**, eagerly awaiting the Lord's return. But how can we do this over a lifetime of 30, 50, 70 or 80 years? How can we keep the excitement of the prospect of heaven and of Christ's coming alive?

With the one thing that will not pass away! The Word of God! It is the most powerful force in this world. For in that powerful Word there is salvation, there is forgiveness of sins, there is life over death, there is the power to create saving faith in a spiritually dead heart and there is victory over Satan's attacks. The Word will last forever. This world, Christmas celebrations, shopping, working and playing all will come to an end. Everything we see and do on this earth will come to an end, but God's Word will never pass away.

And it is Jesus who directs us to His Word this morning and

ENCOURAGES US TO WATCHFULNESS **I. BY SHOWING US A LESSON FROM THE PAST** **II. APPLIED TO THE PRESENT** **III: CONCERNING THE FUTURE!**

Every now and then we hear of someone who predicts the date of the end of the world. This is not only foolish nonsense, but it is also unscriptural. Jesus said that no one, not even the angels know the Day of Judgment. The Father alone knows. In His humiliation as the God-Man, even Jesus did not know. And there is a good reason why we don't know. By not knowing, it impresses on us the necessity of being watchful, faithful and ready all of the time.

The lesson from the past that teaches us this is the flood. Jesus says, **"BUT AS THE DAYS OF NOAH WERE, SO ALSO WILL THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN BE. 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, AND DID NOT KNOW UNTIL THE FLOOD CAME AND TOOK THEM ALL AWAY, SO ALSO WILL THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN BE."**

The world of Noah's day was much like ours. Immorality was rampant, gross materialism filled the people's hearts, they lived for this life, burying themselves and busying themselves in worldly cares and concerns, thinking themselves to be secure as long as their needs were being met. They had little if any thought for eternity, the afterlife. It was really worse than our day in this respect—the Lord found only 8 people on the earth who believed in His promise of salvation through the coming Messiah—only 8!

What happened? Didn't the people know something was going to happen? Hadn't they heard? Oh, yes, they heard. The Apostle Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness. No doubt from the first time God told Noah about the worldwide flood, some 120 years before it came, Noah began warning the people. But they refused to heed the signs of the times, refused to listen to God's Word. They were too wrapped up in the affairs of life, the things of this world. They cared for nothing but what they could have in the here and now. They rejected God's Word.

We look back to the time of the flood and read in Genesis **THEN THE LORD SAW THAT THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN WAS GREAT IN THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY INTENT OF THE THOUGHTS OF HIS HEART WAS ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY. . . THE EARTH ALSO WAS CORRUPT BEFORE GOD, AND THE EARTH WAS FILLED WITH VIOLENCE. SO GOD LOOKED UPON THE EARTH, AND INDEED IT WAS CORRUPT; FOR ALL FLESH HAD CORRUPTED THEIR WAY ON THE EARTH.**

What do you think God sees today when He looks down upon this earth, looks at us and all of mankind? He sees violence, wickedness, corruption, sin and immorality--people living indulgently for themselves, living only for this life. How do most people respond to God's warnings and to His message of Judgment, of the Last Day, of His Return, of the Resurrection? Well look at our churches. If they are half full we are happy. There are probably more people in bars on Saturday night than in church on a Sunday morning. What's important, the here and now or the hereafter? To most the answer is simple. If I can't feel it; taste it; use it; play with it; work with it, watch it or wear it; it can't be of much use! What a rejection of God's clear Words. The danger is there for us also because of our sinful flesh.

In Noah's day they were eating and drinking, working and marrying right up to the day it began to rain. In our day we could say the people will be eating, drinking, sleeping, working, watching TV, going to the movies, reading their books, texting and surfing the net right up to the very end.

The main point of this Old Testament lesson is the suddenness of it all and the need to be watchful and prepared. God planned the flood 120 years in advance. He gave the people of this world 120 years of grace to repent of their ways, to listen to Noah, to prepare their hearts; but they refused to listen and believe the message of Judgment. No doubt many of them mocked Noah for building this huge boat on dry ground and talking about a world wide flood. Can never happen!

And then it began to rain and rain and rain and the ground burst open and gushers came from caverns below and there was no escape. The time of grace was over. There was no place of refuge, no mountain high enough. Imagine the screams, the cries for help; the grasping and clawing to hang on to whatever they could as they floated away to their deaths. No doubt there were those with hatred and defiance in their hearts toward God who cursed Him as they were washed away to drown.

Even as the flood came suddenly upon the unsuspecting, apathetic and unwatchful unbelievers of Noah's day, so shall the end come upon the unbelieving people of today. Christ's second coming shall be as a thief in the night—unexpected and sudden! When He comes, the great separation will take place. Our Lord calls it the separation of the sheep from the goats. In our text He says, **"THEN TWO MEN WILL BE IN THE FIELD: ONE WILL BE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT. TWO WOMEN WILL BE GRINDING AT THE MILL: ONE WILL BE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT."** One will be taken to be with the Lord Jesus in eternal glory in heaven, the other left to eternal

damnation in hell. The one gloriously raised to meet the Lord in the mansions above, the other sent to the prison of the doomed in hell.

At the sound of the trumpet blast, at the sight of God's Angels and of Jesus Himself in all of His full blown glory and splendor; then it will be too late. Too late to start to prepare, too late to start to arrange your priorities, too late to think about eternity, too late to repent, too late to say, "I always intended to learn about Jesus. I always meant to get involved. I always thought there would be more time."

Just like Noah's day people will run to and fro trying to find refuge, or to hide from God's Judgment. In another Gospel, Jesus says people will cry out to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us!" But also like Noah's day there will be no escape. For all will be brought before the Judgment seat of Christ.

The believer in Jesus, the one whose has been led to acknowledge his sins and repent of them, whose heart rests alone in Christ as Savior, will be like Noah and his family safe and secure in the ark—we will be safe and secure in our loving Savior and in His righteousness. With faith in Christ we will be wearing Christ's white robe of righteousness and declared **NOT GUILTY—INNOCENT** of all sins, in fact **RIGHTEOUS** because of Jesus' perfect life and perfect sacrifice of His blood.

Jesus Thy blood and righteousness my beauty are my glorious dress; midst flaming worlds in these arrayed with joy shall I life up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day for who aught to my charge shall lay? Fully thro' these absolved I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

The unbelievers will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ with no Savior, no perfect robe of righteousness, no sacrifice for their sins, no substitute. They trusted in themselves during this life so they shall stand by themselves in the Judgment with the spotted, stained robes of their own sins.

ARE WE PREPARED, ARE WE READY? Jesus has given us almost 2,000 years of warning. Will Judgment Day catch us unawares, unprepared, unfaithful, unrepentant, unclothed in Christ's righteousness? Not if we look to the Word in our devotions and Bible readings; come consistently to God's house to hear His Word; acknowledge our sins and lay them all on Jesus and with eyes of faith keep watch over our life and keep watch for our Savior.

May this morning's Bible readings and sermon text be an encouragement to fervent, zealous, eager watching and waiting for our Lord Jesus; ever willing to live for Him in the here and now for He lived for us and also eagerly waiting to live with Him forever in the hereafter.

Forever with the Lord! Amen! So let it be! Life from the dead is in that word, 'Tis immortality.

Forever with the Lord! O Father, 'tis Thy will. The promise of that faithful Word even here to me fulfill. Amen.