

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 19, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 604, 611:1, 64, 609, 479:3.

Lessons: Genesis 6:9-22, 2 Peter 1:19-2:9, Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:37-44.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Advent season has to do with “coming”. The foremost thing in our mind is probably the celebration of the coming birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

But Scripture speaks of Jesus “coming” in several ways. One of those is his coming to judge the living and the dead on the last day. We do not know when that will come, but Scripture reminds us to

KEEP WATCH! YOU MUST BE READY.

- 1. You do not know when the Lord will come to end this world.**
- 2. Jesus gives us examples of how suddenly it will happen.**
- 3. The Day of Judgement will be a day of joy for the believer.**

The Word of God has a great deal to say about judgment day. Although it does not tell us specifically when it will come, it warns us repeatedly to keep watch and be ready at any time.

Even though we confess in the Creeds every Sunday that Jesus Christ “will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead”, it is so easy to become complacent about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we surely aren’t complacent and indifferent about the celebration of Jesus’ first coming to earth. For weeks you have been making plans and preparations for that celebration.

But do we think much about the unknown time when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead? Perhaps we should spend more time thinking about that. As God’s beloved children by faith in Jesus Christ, we look forward to that day with longing, especially the older we get, desiring Jesus to come quickly.

Today Jesus points us to the time of Noah. God was warning the world through Noah that judgment would come upon them. They didn’t know when it would happen, but for 120 years Noah was warning people to repent before it was too late.

At that time the world was extremely wicked. You heard that *“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”* (Genesis 6:5 NIV) Because of that, God brought utter destruction through a world-wide flood upon all mankind except for the eight souls saved in the ark, Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 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; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.”

So people obviously ignored Noah and the warnings given by him. They were carrying on with their lives as if nothing bad would ever happen to them. They no doubt expected that they would live nice, long lives, and die of old age unless some disease they acquired because of their wickedness killed them first, and it is not likely they were too concerned about that. People today sure don’t seem concerned about that. After all, there are medicines and vaccines, aren’t there? At any rate, they were content with their lives, and continued to ‘live it up’ without concern for what would happen after they died.

The kinds of things Jesus speaks of are the kinds of things that people enjoy. Eating, drinking, celebrating, and marrying. And I think we know the ways in which many people celebrate. Many cannot celebrate anything without all sorts of immorality and overindulgence, ignoring and despising God's will and commands. And, of course, there is also the danger of simply abusing things God has given us. Alcohol has become a great part of celebrating today. It seems that some people think and act like they can't live without alcohol or even other drugs, things which dull our senses, and make us less alert and responsive and responsible.

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, 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)

Then, in the 40 days and nights that torrents of rain came down and underground fountains poured out water, they learned, to their sorrow, that Noah was right in his warnings. But God's judgment came upon them suddenly.

If mankind was wicked in Noah's day, how much more wicked must mankind be today? Don't we daily hear and see mankind grow much more evil? And there is no end in sight of growing wickedness and even boasting of that sinfulness.

Jesus goes on: ***"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."*** Just that suddenly. Just that unexpectedly. Not only will their lives end, but they will end with the judgment of Jesus Christ coming upon them immediately. There will be no second chance. Our Gospel lesson made that clear. At the time of God's judgment Scripture says of unbelievers: ***"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*** (Matthew 25:46) Every person will either be saved eternally or will be condemned to eternal damnation. It is not true that there will be any second chance after death.

There is no time lapse between death and judgment. When one of the criminals crucified with Jesus ***"said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'"*** (Luke 23:42-43) In Ecclesiastes we read: ***"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth."*** Why? Because when you die that is the end: ***"the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."*** (Ecclesiastes 12:1 and 7)

Death is inevitable. Judgment day is inevitable. Whichever comes first will end your earthly life. And no man knows when that will happen. Death may come upon us suddenly and you may even have known people to whom that has happened. Judgment day will also come upon us suddenly.

Jesus' coming in judgment will occur at any time. Jesus tells us in the words immediately before our text: ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*** (Matthew 24:36) In his humility while he was on earth, he says he did not know the moment of judgment. It will come without further warning. Instead of trying to figure out when it will happen, Jesus urges us to be ready. We have become so accustomed to warnings of natural disasters that we might think that there will be some warning of the moment of our eternal judgment. Supposedly, some even think that Jesus will appear in Jerusalem on judgment day and the rest of the world can see it on television news live, as it spreads around the world, thus giving them time to repent! Not so, says Jesus. Pay no attention to what men tell you; even people who claim to speak for God, or who claim to know the Bible. You must look only at Jesus' words!

Scripture gives us examples of God warning people before he pours out his wrath upon them. It is typical of humans to ignore the warning and be caught by surprise when his judgment comes. God has warned us in the Scriptures. That is why, from our point of view, the Last Day will come like a thief. God is warning us today! ***"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*** Jesus gives us another picture to shock us into being alert. He uses the picture of a thief breaking in. ***"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."*** Of course! If we know when a thief is coming, we will be ready! But we don't know when a thief will break in. In the same way we don't know when Jesus will come.

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Be on guard! Be alert! Don't immerse yourself in the things of this world and in that way lose your own soul. Always keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Saint Mark writes: ***"If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*** (Mark 13:36-37) ***"You do not know on what day***

your Lord will come.” The day he comes will be a terrible day for all who rejected Jesus, but a happy day of ultimate blessing for believers.

Remember Jesus’ words on judgment day to the unbelievers who rejected him: ***“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*** (Matthew 25:41) That is their eternal damnation.

It will be a joyous day for all who believe in him when Jesus comes. It may come after much tribulation, but it will come. Jesus, our Savior and King tells us ***“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”*** (Matthew 25:34) The book of Revelation, especially the last chapters, is filled with pictures of the bliss, beauty and glory of heaven which is waiting for all who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin.

Just as for Noah and his family the great flood had a blessed ending, so will judgment day – or death – bring a blessed ending on earth for each believer. After the flood Noah and his family thanked the Lord God and sacrificed offerings to him, God said ***“I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.’ And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’”*** (Genesis 9:11-13)

We find our comfort in knowing and believing that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, obeying God’s laws and will perfectly, and then he was punished, crucified, dead, and buried in the place of all sinners. And God gives that righteousness of Jesus to us, and to all who believe! Listen to the comfort in the very last words of the Bible: ***“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”*** (Revelation 22:20-21)