



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

December 2, 2007

1st Sunday of Advent

Matthew 24:36-44

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 18

Second Lesson: Romans 13:11-14

Gospel: Matthew 24:36-44

Keep Watch for Jesus' Coming

Did you ever have a dream that kind of comes and goes at times about you needing to be some place and you just can't get ready in time? You can't find the clothes you are looking for. You can't do whatever it is. You can't get there. You keep making a wrong turn with the car, whatever it is. I still have a recurring dream from time to time about preaching some place and I can't get there or I can't find a dress shirt to put on before I get there. That one I've had a number of times. I've also had a dream where I'm preaching at a different location, some great big gathering in some auditorium, and I can't find how to get up to the stage. So I am running around back stage trying to get up there and before I know it, the service is over and I didn't get to preach. That is just irritating. That's not restful sleep.

Recurring dreams about being ready for something or not being able to get something done are fairly common, I believe, for a lot of people. But the end result often is only just not quite such restful sleep, and that's not that big of a deal. Some of you will be catching up on it right now if you had the dream last night, right? But God does tell us about a "being ready" that is more important and that has a lot more to it than just having a restful night's sleep.

On the first Sunday of Advent, our God talks to us about being ready for his second coming and not falling into a spiritual sleep, because this has deadly consequences. So this morning, our God tells us to keep watch for Christ's second coming. Keep watch by having our priorities set straight is what he really talks about this morning, and keep watch by being ready—what exactly that means, we will look at.

These words that Jesus speaks this morning, he spoke to his disciples. They came in response to the disciples' questions of when these things would happen. Jesus had talked about the temple being destroyed. Not only did he answer the questions about the temple being destroyed, but he went into explaining Christ's second coming and what is going to happen at the end of the world when he comes again to judge the living and the dead like we say in the Creed. In the next chapter after this, he talks about separating the sheep and the goats and the judgment that will take place. But right here in this section, he is talking about how no one is going to know. So you need to always be ready.

He uses a couple of pictures to make that point of the need to keep watch. The first one is the people at the time of the flood—how they were marrying and giving in marriage, how they were going about their daily lives and had no regard for what had been told

them by Noah, a preacher of righteousness. Then the flood came, and they were all swept away because they weren't ready for it. They didn't repent. They didn't turn back to the Lord.

We've got the translation in here that says they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came. They knew. It's a knowledge that is more than just a head knowledge that is here. It's a heart knowledge that this Word is talking about in our text. They knew because Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but they blew him off as that crazy guy that is building a box some place, this humongous box. And he is talking about some flood. Who is going to listen to that guy? He's just a nut job. They had heard, but they didn't believe the message. So when the flood came, they were swept away because they had not turned back to the Lord their God, the One who had created them.

And the sameness, the routine of day after day had lulled them into complacency, right? Does that ever happen? You do the same things every day. You have to get up. You have to do your work. You have to do your chores. You have to do whatever it is you do. You have to go to school. You have to come home. You do this. You do that. And before you know it, it's the end of the week and the weekend is here, and you are figuring out how you are going to fill it with 3,000 activities in three hours. Before you know it, you are exhausted and you are sitting there and you're thinking, "What is it we were celebrating at this time of the year?" The routine of our daily lives at times can lead us to not focus on what is unseen but to only focus on what is seen and that is our daily lives.

So sometimes it's easy for you and me, even as Christians who love our Lord and believe that our Lord has taken away our sins, to be numbed into this routine and the sameness of it and forget about what is truly the priority in our lives. That priority in our lives is God, who he is and what he has done, how he loved us in spite of our sins, how he took away our sins through sending Christ—not only to be born in Bethlehem, but to live a perfect life in our place and to die in our place—to die for all the sins that we commit, including the sins of indifference to God at times in our daily lives. There is a constant temptation for you and me to pigeon hole God—to put him in this little cubby hole. God's time is maybe Sunday morning, Thursday night, whenever it is that we go to church regularly, and sometimes we forget that God-time is every waking moment. Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. We forget that we are either glorifying God or we are not in our daily life. If we are not, we are sinning. When we sin, then we need that reminder to say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." And we need to turn back to the Lord our God and not just say, "It's no big deal. Everyone does it." Or make all the excuses. God puts opportunities in front of us day after day to serve him, day after day to know him better and at times, you and I seize those opportunities with joy in the strength of our faith. There are other times that we don't.

Don't be numbed by the daily routine of your life into forgetting what your priority is. Your priority is to glorify God in all that you do, even in the same routines that you do day after day after day. They also are a way that you serve God. When you know that you are forgiven by your Lord, when you know that you are loved by your Lord, when you know that your Lord has washed away all the times that you haven't made him a

priority, you are moved to want to do it even more. You are moved to serve him in the smallest things and saying, “I’m doing this because God has brought this child into my life, this spouse into my life, this employer or this employee into my life, and here is how I can thank God for his salvation. I can love them as I love myself. I can love them as I love God.” That is how we keep the priority that God would have us so that we do all things to his glory.

That’s a tall task. To be perfectly honest, you and I are too short to meet that task quite often, right? That is why our Lord urges us also to be ready for Christ’s second coming. He uses an illustration that is just, I think, simple for us to understand, right? The day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night. If the owner of the house had known at what time the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and kept from being robbed, right? Thieves don’t call up and say, “Hey, I’m going to be in your neighborhood on Thursday at about 3 a.m. Does that work for you? I would kind of like to take all your valuables. Is that a problem?” That’s not how it works. They come when you don’t expect them or when they think you won’t expect them. You don’t go shopping and leave your car running and your keys in the car, because you don’t want someone to take it. To keep that from happening, to keep watch so that it doesn’t happen, you lock your car, you take your keys with you, things like that, right? If you’re worried about your house being broken into, what do you do? You get an alarm system or make sure you lock your doors. Whatever it is, they are precautions you will take so that you won’t be robbed. Maybe you get a big dog or you just leave the kids home, things that will scare away a thief. But if you are worried about that, you do things to be ready for it. It’s simple. It’s straightforward. God makes it easy for us to understand.

Then he says to us in the same way, “Since you don’t know when the second coming is going to be, you don’t know when God is going to come to judge the living and the dead, be ready at all times.” Take the steps that you need to take so that you are ready. If you want to know what those steps are, just go back to our Second Lesson.

Really a neat phrase at the end of the Second Lesson from Romans—did you catch that in there today? I think it’s just a really neat phrase—don’t behave in the deeds of darkness. Live in the light—he made that point, but then he said, rather clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus. That is a neat phrase. That is how you and I are ready for his second coming. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus.

You are probably thinking, “Thanks Pastor. That helps. Now how do I clothe myself with the Lord Jesus? What in the dickens are you talking about now?” But think about it—you were clothed with the Lord Jesus at your baptism, right? You were baptized into Christ and clothed with his righteousness. His perfection became yours. You continue to clothe yourself with Christ as you daily repent when you return to the waters of your baptism where God washed away your sins. You daily clothe yourself with Christ as you spend time in his Word so that his Spirit strengthens you in your faith. That is what God does. He helps us through life’s difficulties as again and again we see how he keeps his promises. We see that in his Word.

We’ll also be taught, like we saw this morning in really a fun Bible class I thought, that there are going to be things in our lives that we don’t understand why God allows what

he allows, but he simply tells us to trust him. Time and again God is smarter than we are. We don't always need to know the reasons for why he allows what he allows. We just need to know that he loves us and that he has taken away our sins. The place where we get that reminder when Satan is chiseling away at that foundation of our faith is in his Word and in his Sacraments.

So find time for God's Word. The Meditations Booklet—pick it up off all those racks. It's a short page. You can read that quickly. Don't watch that commercial for the 15th time. Open your Meditations Booklet. Read your Bible. Come to a Bible class and learn from some other people that we have some really sharp Christians that can teach you a lot better than I can as you listen to them in our Bible classes. Have home devotions where you talk about God's Word together. Just find a way, whatever works for you, to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ. God doesn't say this is the way you have to do it. He just simply tells us to do it.

Find the way that works best for you in your life right now and clothe yourself with Christ, and you will be ready whenever his return is, because even if he doesn't return in our lifetime, the day will come when he will call us out of this world. That might happen suddenly. We might not have time to gather all of our family and friends and say our goodbyes. Driving on roads like last night, someone else might be a little too aggressive and cross the line and our life could end just like that. We need to always be ready because we never know when the Lord will call us out of this world.

We don't need to know when. We just need to know where we are going when this world ends or when our life ends. As long as we know where we are going, we are ready to meet our Lord. Make that a priority and you will keep watch!