



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 29, 2009
1st Sunday of Advent
Genesis 19:15-17, 23-29
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 19:15-17, 23-29
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 25
Second Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

The Judgment is coming, but there will be deliverance for God's people

I'm sure you are familiar with the saying "He who hesitates is lost." You've probably heard that before. I don't know if its origin is associated with what I just read to you about Lot and his family, but it sure would make sense, wouldn't it? He who hesitates is lost. Lot's wife hesitated. She focused on all she was leaving behind. She didn't want to focus on God's promise and what God had said and God's mercy. She focused on what her heart loved. She hesitated, and she became a pillar of salt.

As we begin a new church year and the season of Advent, we focus on the meaning of the word "advent," which is "coming." We focus on preparing our hearts for Christ's coming into the world the first time in Bethlehem at his birth. We prepare ourselves by his coming to us through Word and Sacrament to teach us, strengthen us, equip us, comfort us; but then we also focus on his second coming at the end of the world. That's kind of what all of our readings this morning focused upon. And this lesson that I just read to you from Genesis focuses our hearts on how important it is that we don't hesitate, that we prepare, that we don't put it off. Being ready for Christ's second coming isn't something that you take pride in saying "I am going to wait until the last minute" like some of you people out here do about getting Christmas gifts. You take pride in saying you wait until everything is closed except the convenience store and then you run down and pick up a gift and whatever is left there you get. Some of you take a lot of delight in saying that, right?

Our God is telling us not to do that when it comes to preparing your hearts to meet Christ at his second coming. Whether or not his second coming is a minute off or a thousand years off, it doesn't really matter. You always need to be ready because even if his second coming comes after our lifetime, there is going to be an end to our lifetime, right? And the unfortunate thing is that it doesn't come on our timetable. It doesn't come when we plan. We might plan and we might prepare and we might say "We are going to do this when we retire" or "we're going to do that," but you and I aren't guaranteed tomorrow. So this idea of not hesitating and preparing for Christ's second coming is of absolute importance to us. It happens over and over, or it's driven home to us at least for a time, the importance of preparing and not hesitating and not waiting. Not everyone dies of a ripe old age. Not everyone dies after living a full life. This should be a reminder to us of just how important it is to not hesitate, to not imitate Lot and his family and have to be dragged kicking and screaming to be prepared for Christ's second coming.

We see this morning how important it is that we listen carefully to the Words of our God and we hear his warnings. Then we focus on God's absolutely certain and merciful promises. That's the foundation of what I read to you from Genesis.

You might be familiar with the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. You might be familiar with what led up to it and what is referred to at the end of what I read to you where Abraham comes out and looks, because Abraham had gone to the place where he had met with the Lord. He had met with the Lord and he pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah. The travelers that had come and stayed at his house, he later recognized that they were messengers from God. They had come and told him what God was going to do and how God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham pleaded and pleaded and pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah because of his relative, Lot, that was there.

Do you remember how he said "If there is this many," and then he cut the number down, and he cut the number down, and he cut the number down, and finally he said "If there are 10 righteous people there Lord, please spare the city." The Lord said, "If I find 10 righteous people there, I will spare the city." Well, there weren't 10 righteous people there, but God, in his grace and mercy, still spared Lot.

Right before where we started, the angels had come and wanted to stay at Lot's house. Do you remember what happened? All the men of the city came and said "Send those two visitors out to us. We want to have sex with them." Lot said "No. Take my two daughters who are pledged to be married to someone. Take them instead. Do what you want with them, but don't hurt these guests that are under the care and protection of my house." Then the angels struck these guys blind and led Lot and his family out through this mob that had gathered together to rape these two visitors. These angels demonstrated their power by striking them blind. Then it says when the morning came, as dawn was approaching, they said "Hurry! Take your daughters and your wife and get out or you will be swept away when the city is punished." They had just told them also, "go tell your sons-in-law." They went and told the sons-in-law, and the sons-in-law laughed at Lot and thought he was joking. They thought that was a good one; that God is going to destroy the city.

They had seen the power and they still had to be grabbed by the hand and dragged out of the city. Then they said to flee to the mountains. Then there is the section of the text that we didn't read from Genesis. Lot said, "No, that's too far. Let us just go to Zoar. That's a small little city. Let us just go there." So God, in his mercy, allowed them just to go there.

Lot went kicking and screaming the whole way. He didn't listen real carefully. He didn't pay close attention and yet God, in his mercy, kept reaching out to him and then finally dragged him kicking and screaming and told him to get out. "Flee for your lives. Don't look back. Don't stop anywhere or you are going to be swept away." Evidently Lot listened carefully to that and so did his daughters. But his wife didn't. Her heart was set

on the things that she was missing, so she looked back and she was turned into a pillar of salt.

Then came destruction the likes of which the earth had not seen; a burning sulfur coming down that destroyed the cities, the people in the cities, and even the vegetation so that things would not grow there from everything that had corrupted the soil. God had warned them. God had shown mercy because God remembered Abraham and his promises to Abraham.

Hesitation – the idea that we can wait and we can take care of it later is a lie of Satan. Hesitation and focusing on the things of this world and forgetting about the things of the world to come is a lie of Satan. It cost Lot's wife her life.

You and I can't hesitate. You and I need to know that there is only one answer to our sins. The sin of our putting other things before God, the sin of our hesitating and focusing only on the things that we can see and thinking that we'll have time to get ready to meet our maker; all of these sins that we commit against our God have only one answer and one cure. That one answer is Jesus' perfect life and his death in our place. There's only one place to find that perfect cure. That's in the Gospel.

The Gospel now comes to us in the Word. It comes to us in Baptism. It comes to us in the Lord's Supper. But it's the same Gospel in all these different forms. Just like God was merciful to Abraham and showed mercy to Abraham by rescuing Lot even though he didn't find 10 righteous people, God is merciful to us. He comes to us through the spoken Word. He comes to us through the visual Gospel of the water and the Word. He comes to us and affects all of our senses with taste, sight, smell, touch as we receive his very body and blood in, with and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins. God, in his mercy, keeps his promises to us in these amazing ways because he knows how frail and how weak we are. He knows that we all have spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder because we are distracted easily by Satan and forget what is truly the greatest priority in our lives; to know God and getting to know him better.

We get distracted. But God is faithful to his certain promises. God is faithful where we are faithless Paul says. God, who works faith in our hearts, keeps us in that state of grace.

Prepared does not mean, don't ever sin again. That's never going to happen. You and I are going to sin again. Prepare means to always live in this state of grace knowing that we are sinners who live covered by Jesus' blood and righteousness. He lived and died in our place. Now we live in this state of being connected to him. That doesn't mean that we say we are going to sin more so that God will forgive us more. It means that we know we are forgiven.

And even when we fall, through faith in Christ we have this state of grace that we live in. That is the greatest treasure that we have. Do not ever neglect it. Don't think it's

unimportant. Don't think it's just a choice among many choices. It is the most precious treasure that God has given to us. And to put it off and think that we can prepare some other day and some other place is absolute foolishness. God puts the reminders of this in the newspapers time after time, day after day. If you read the Obituaries, you will notice that not everyone dies at a ripe old age.

So prepare, be ready. Prepare one another. Share with one another the greatest treasure that we have, which is the knowledge that in Christ, we are forgiven. In Christ, we have heaven. That's the greatest gift that we have. For the love of God, don't neglect it.