

First Sunday in Advent
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
27 November 2016

Matthew 24:36-44

If you are anything like me, you don't like waiting. I want what I want, when I want it, and in the proportions or quantities I want. I don't like lines. I become impatient seating in waiting rooms. I despise holding for ATT operators or waiting until the following week for another episode of my favorite crime show. I prefer the immediate, the right now, the in the moment. Binging on Netflix, eating what I want and when I want, having choices at my finger tips.

And it is because I have such an aversion to waiting that the readings from Isaiah and Matthew are hard for me. Both of these readings announce a yet-to-come time when God will bring about a world of peace and justice, a time of refreshment and rest, a time of vindication and rejoicing. The day will come when all wars will disappear, all sadness will be erased from the human heart, when loneliness and isolation will forever be conquered, when that empty space at the center of the human heart will be filled with the glory and love of God. The time will come when those who feel abandoned and forgotten by God will see him face to face and will find all the answers they seek. The time will come one day when darkness will be forever vanquished and humanity will walk in the light and brilliance of God's ways. This will be a time of unity and love. This will be a time of restoration. This will be a time when Christ himself will rule supreme and humanity will come under the protection of his loving arms and we will be home with God and those we love.

This is the reality we wait for, but Matthew today demands that we be ready as we wait, lest we lose the opportunity to join Christ when he returns. Let us look at this reading in more detail. Matthew demands that we be ready. Let us place this portion of Matthew within its context. This unit is part of a larger unit known as the fifth sermon of Matthew. This fifth sermon began on verse 1 of Chapter 23 and will end on verse 46 of Chapter 25. Experts believe that Matthew wrote five extensive sermons which he placed within the narrative of the Gospel of Mark at 5 various points. The theme of this last sermon is judgement. The sermon begins with warnings against the hypocritical behaviors of the leaders of the day who present the outward signs of religiosity, but whose hearts are very distant from the Lord. The sermon then moves to talk about the future destruction of the Temple and the signs of the end of times. "For at that time

there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” Many will come saying that they are the Messiah, “false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” On that day “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.” This will be in fact a most terrible day of judgement for those who have not accepted Jesus.

The thought on the disciples minds is very clear, “When?” When will all of this happen? And this is where our reading today provides an answer. Jesus states that only God knows when this day will come. He presents two illustrations to make this point. One is the example of the “Lost Generation” during the time of Noah. Those who perished in the flood. They were busy with their normal every day lives, consumed with the responsibilities that every day brought. They were eating and drinking, an image that speaks of taking care of physical needs. They were marrying and giving into marriage, an image that speaks of emotional needs. But they “knew nothing, until the flood came and swept them all away.” As concerned as they were with the physical and emotional needs of every day life, they knew nothing, in the sense that they didn’t know the Lord. They had no wisdom because they did not fear, love and obey the Lord. Their lives were consumed with the ordinariness of every day life to the point that they failed to see God among them, they failed to love him, and they failed to obey him. In this sense they were a wicked generation. Jesus concludes, “it will be the same for this generation when the Son of Man comes.”

Then Jesus gives them another example to make this point. If the owner of the house knew when a thief was to break in, he would do all in his power to protect his property. But thieves don’t make appointments. They don’t fit your house in between prior commitments and call first to check with you about their plans. They simply wait for the right time and then break in when you least expect it. Then Jesus says, it will be the same when he comes. The Son of Man will come as a thief in the night.

The lesson of both of these examples that Jesus gives them today is that since the disciples and since we ourselves don’t know the day or the hour for our Lord’s return, we must be always ready. We must approach each day with the same care some take in preparing for Black Friday shopping. We must be alert, awake, focused, and determined.

My friends today is the first Sunday of Advent, the season of preparation for our Lord's birth. As we prepare to celebrate another birthday of Jesus on Christmas day, we must also prepare for that other coming at the end of days. We must be alert and ready. The next few weeks will be a time of anxiety for some, and a time of depression and crushing loneliness for others. This will be a time when the ordinariness of every day life will become very important for us. We will worry about buying stuff, preparing the right meal, inviting the right people to our parties, preparing our house and town the best way we can for the visitors that will come out to see us, etc. But we can not let this ordinariness of life distract us from our primary task this season of Advent. This primary task is to prepare our hearts and the hearts of our families to receive Christ anew this coming Christmas day. The main task is to see the Lord among us and to offer him the honor, worship, and love he deserves. Our main task is to prepare a place for him at the inn of our hearts.

May this time of anticipation make us all more aware of the needs of others. May this time of preparation make us more aware of our need for Christ in our lives. May this time of looking forward fill our hearts with joyful expectation as we await the coming of our King, Redeemer and Friend. Amen!