

December 1, 2019
1st Sunday of Advent
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Advent: When Will He Arrive?

Matthew 24:37–44 (NIV84)

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: 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. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Things have changed dramatically in the world of package delivery in the past few decades. It used to be that when you ordered something, you had to call by phone to order it. Or maybe you even filled out a paper form and put it in the mail to order what you wanted. Then you waited. They gave you an estimated time for delivery. Maybe a week. Likely 4 weeks plus or minus. And it was difficult to wait that long for something you really wanted. Every day you would check the mail to see if it arrived. For many days you would be disappointed but finally there would be excitement to see a package at the door. It arrived!

We are spoiled now. Touch a button on your phone. And then you can track the package and see exactly where it is at any time. You know exactly what day and likely what time it will be delivered. Maybe you get a notification when the delivery driver has dropped it off. And it only takes a couple of days in many cases. There is no surprise and not much waiting. In one way modern delivery is a little boring. But we like fast delivery.

Today is the first day of the Church year, the first Sunday of Advent. During Advent we prepare our hearts for the arrival of Christ. His arrival is nothing like modern delivery. First of all, Christ's advent is actually two arrivals, first as a child in a manger in Bethlehem, second as the King of kings and Judge of the world. We consider the second advent of Christ today. Neither of Christ's advents has a tracking number. There was no deliver by date. The believers before Christ was born of Mary only knew that God promised to send a Savior, not when that would happen. All the Scriptures tell us about the second coming of Christ is that he is coming, but not the date.

Today we ask the question: When Will He Arrive? We don't ask this question to determine the date and time of Christ's second advent. Instead we ask the question so we are ready. We want to be like the child running to the mailbox every day to see if the package has arrived. We want to look forward to the advent of Christ with joyful anticipation each day. When Will He Arrive?

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all

away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

When I was young I had a certain image of what it was like at the time of Noah. Genesis tells us that the hearts of men were evil. It speaks of violence filling the earth. I pictured people robbing each other, attacking neighbors, and general anarchy where the strong oppressed the weak in every place. I pictured a violent, evil world that no one would want to live in. But Jesus gives us a fuller picture of the time of Noah. Certainly it was full of evil and sin and violence. However, some people were enjoying life.

People were eating and drinking. They were enjoying meals with others. People were marrying and being given in marriage. That is a happy time as a man and woman become husband and wife. Families gather to celebrate with more eating and drinking. Children are brought into the world in the next years after marriage, bringing joy to the parents and grandparents. These don't sound like evil or violent people. As long as the eating was not gluttony or the drinking leading to drunkenness, these activities don't sound sinful. It sounds like people who were enjoying life....Until the flood came and took them all away.

They did not even consider it possible that Noah could be right. They ignored the signs that a flood was coming. Noah was building a boat that was large enough to be noticed and Noah was a preacher of righteousness. But the people enjoying life wouldn't let the signs of a flood change their lives.

While there is still plenty of violence in this world and great evil, there are also many people who simply live their lives, eat, drink and raise their families. Yet they do not know or care that Christ is going to return as Judge. This attitude is a constant danger for believers too. We can get caught up in our secular, good lives and forget to ask the question, "When will he arrive?"

It is much easier to think about Christ and his second advent when we are here on Sunday. Do we think about Jesus when we go home from church and watch the football game? Do we think about Jesus and his second coming when we get ready for work on Monday morning? Do you think about Jesus while you are at school during the week? Do we think about Christ while playing sports or playing video games? Do we think that Jesus could arrive today when we go out with friends to eat and drink? And if we don't include Christ in these good activities, soon these good activities will fill our lives and Christ will be pushed out.

Christ himself warns us today to not be like the people at Noah's time who lived their lives while ignoring the signs to repent before the flood. Christ tells us to be ready every day for him to arrive. He wants his arrival on the Last Day to be a good surprise and not one that brings us eternal destruction.

Jesus emphasizes this by changing the picture:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

We want to be among the ones taken. You do not want to be left behind. For those who were not on the ark were left behind and they perished in the flood. Those left behind when Jesus returns will perish in hell. But those taken are taken to heaven to be with Christ forever. How can you be sure that you are among those who will be taken at Christ's second advent? God has marked you with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. God has put his own name on you when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And the first advent of Christ, when he was born of Mary, also proves that you are among those who will be glad on the day of Christ's second advent. For the Son of God and Mary's Son lived and died for you. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the entire world. Our minds slip into enjoying earthly life instead of focusing on Christ. We lose focus. But our God never forgets his promises to us in Christ. Our God is always focused on us and on our salvation.

Therefore we live our lives as if each day is the day we will see Jesus return. Not in fear, but with a joy that makes each day special. Each day is a gift from the Lord. Each day is an opportunity to serve him. And notice how the people taken to heaven were serving Christ. *Two men will be in the field;Two women will be grinding with a hand mill.*

They were going about normal life, farming and preparing food for their families. So too, we give thanks to Christ and prepare for his second advent by going about our normal life. But instead of letting normal life push Jesus away, our normal life is elevated to a higher purpose. In all we do, we reflect Christ. Whether we clean the factory, design the factory or own the factory, we serve Christ by doing those things well. Whether we are taking care of our children, teaching other people's children or standing in front of a congregation as a pastor, we do what we do because Christ has forgiven us. Living in joyful anticipation of Christ's second advent does not necessarily change what we are going to do each day. But it gives our daily life meaning and purpose.

There was one way to help the time go by faster when waiting weeks for a package to arrive. Think about something else. Occupy your mind with other thoughts and pretty soon the days and weeks will go by and the package will arrive. Christ does not want us to use this method of waiting for his second advent. Instead of filling our minds with thoughts of this world, seek first Christ's kingdom and his righteousness. Instead of filling our lives with things that have nothing to do with Christ, do everything in thanks to Christ. Each day we can ask, "When Will He Arrive?" And then run to his Word and Sacraments so that you are even more eager to see the One who lived and died for you.

Amen.