

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our returning Lord and King, Jesus Christ. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “Ready or Not”, and is from the Gospel text, Matthew chapter 24. Let us pray... Amen.

As a young child I loved playing hide and go seek. The game is easy; one person is ‘It’ and the rest go and hide. The one who is ‘It’ counts to a preset number and when he, or she, reaches that preset number, shouts out ‘ready or not, here I come.’ I think most everyone has played it. It’s a great game for kids. It gets their adrenaline pumping in anticipation while they hid and wait hoping not to get found, or while they search to find everyone else. The ones hiding desperately do not want the shame of being the first found, and one who is ‘It’ desperately wants the honour of being able to find everyone.

Yet there is a problem when the game goes too long. Once when I was only about two or three years old, my aunt from out of town came with a friend for a visit. My parents went out one afternoon for a couple of hours and left me with the two of them in charge. Soon after my parents left it was decided to play hide and seek. They counted and I hid. When they finished counting they called out ‘ready or not, here we come’. The two of them started looking for me but could not find me. They searched inside the house and found nothing. They searched the surrounding yard and bush line and came up empty handed. They looked for close to two hours, calling out my name, searching what seemed to be everywhere, panicking, trying to decide how best to break it to my mom, my aunt’s older sister that they lost her only son. They tried just about everything to find me short of calling the police. But it didn’t matter. They had taken a little too long in coming for my short attention span and so I was fast asleep. I completely missed their call because I was not paying attention; I got bored of waiting and fell asleep. I was lost.

Jesus warns us in today’s Gospel reading of exactly this; to stay awake and pay attention to God and His Word. Just like in hide and seek there is a preset number to be counted to; God knows what it is and He alone. It may seem a little long, but that is our sinful nature. This is why Jesus warns us to stay awake and expectant of His return at any second. Scripture is completely fulfilled; everything is in place for Christ to return at any moment. There is nothing left to do, nothing left to happen, no more signs of the last days, because we are already in the last days (Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; Acts 2:17,38). We are waiting for the ‘Ready or not’. The seriousness of getting bored, or tired of waiting, and falling asleep cannot be understated. Those who fall asleep in their faith and thereby reject God separate themselves from Christ; His forgiveness and His salvation.

Jesus is coming and when He comes it is going to be fast. There will be no time for second chances after the final trumpet blasts. All those with faith will immediately be separated from the unbelievers. The faithful will bypass judgment and enter eternal life. Those without faith will have to stand before the Judgment Throne as they have condemned themselves in of their unbelief.

Scripture is extremely clear; only God knows when Christ will return. You, me, and everyone else in all of Creation does not know, nor will we be able to guess or predict the day or the hour. You cannot use existing world events, as many have tried and failed. Only God knows

and He promises it will be soon, really soon, when we hear the ‘Ready or Not.’ So, instead of trying to figure out when Christ will return, or listening to people on TV or radio who claim to have figured it out, Jesus urges us to be ready for His return and not asleep.

Sadly many Christians seem to have lost their expectation of Christ’s imminent return. They have fallen asleep. The result is countless sins and vices follow.

The Gospel reading explains how God’s judgment was poured out in Noah’s time or just this reason. **“The earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.”**(Gen 6:11) But instead of destroying all people at once, God was gracious and merciful. God gave the people lots of time and warning to repent and change. Between the time when God decided to send the flood and the beginning of the rain was 120 years. In that time Noah’s preaching and building of the ark were a clear warnings for the people that God was preparing to judge wickedness by sending a flood. Still people were unaware when the flood came. It is amazing, Noah built a huge ark in a time when it didn’t rain, and he built it away from any major body of water in which it would float. Animals of every kind then showed up and started to enter the ark. How much clearer could God have been? Either Noah was off his rocker for 120 years, or something huge was about to happen. Yet, once the door of the ark was closed and the rain began, those left outside were lost. Only the eight inside; Noah, his wife, their 3 sons, and their sons’ wives were saved through the water of the flood.

Now, the Flood and Christ’s return have many things in common. Just as before the Flood, people continue to proclaim God’s saving Word to an unbelieving world. The world is equally ignorant of God’s Word; His Law and His Promises. It continues to be blind, deaf, and dead in sin. The world continues reject God and His Word. The end result is all those asleep, those who reject Christ will perish eternally. But as similar as the Flood and Christ’s return will be, the Flood was only a precursor of the greater judgment to come at Christ’s return. In the Flood, God used water to deluge the earth, but at Christ’s return the heavens and the earth will be completely destroyed by fire. Unlike hide and seek where a person can hide, at Christ’s return all people will be called out and taken before the throne. Also, for those who are sleeping, they will have the rude awakening as they realize their eternal situation. Christ is coming even if people refuse to believe it. For those who trust in God and His promises, it will be a very good day; for those who do not trust in God it is going to be hell.

Jesus calls you to be ready at all times. You have no excuse not to be. At His return all without faith will also be called out for Judgment, and their lack of faith that will condemn them. It does matter what they do after the trumpet sounds, once the last call is made, there is no turning.

The good news is Jesus has not left us to our own devices. Jesus came some 2000 years ago to live, die and rise for your forgiveness, deliverance from death and the devil, and to bring you eternal life. Jesus has promised to come again on the Last Day at the Resurrection when all will be raised to new life. Jesus continues to come now. As mentioned, in the Advent season we look to Christ’s three Advents, or comings. His first was at His Incarnation, when He took on flesh, was born in a stable to live, die, and rise for our salvation. Christ’s Second Advent is

when He returns on the Last Day and brings about the Resurrection. Jesus also has an Advent with you today, for which we have the privilege of seeing in its fullness.

Jesus came to you in Holy Baptism where He brought you into the Ark of the Holy Christian church, there forgiving you all your sins, delivering you from death to life and from the hands of the devil, and also giving you life (Col 2:12-13; Romans 6:3-5) just as He did with Sullivan this morning. In that flood of water with God’s Word you were brought from eternal death given eternal life. Jesus continues to come to you in His Word every time you hear it, sing it, pray it, read it, and meditate on it. Here in God’s house, God comes and pronounces to you; all your sins are forgiven in Christ and for Christ’s sake. Jesus tells us **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”**(John 5:24) The faith and eternal life given you in your baptism is strengthened every time you hear God’s Word.

But Jesus doesn’t just give you His Word, He also gives you Himself; His body and His blood, broken and shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus comes to you in the Lord’s Supper, His real body with the bread and His real blood with the wine, for your eternal life just as Jesus says in John 6, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”**(John 6:53-58)

While Jesus’ return will be at an hour you do not expect, take comfort with God’s Word resounding in your ears; ‘Your sins are forgiven, you are delivered from death and the devil, and you have eternal life in Christ’. Rejoice as you look back to the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of your Saviour for your salvation. Joyfully look ahead to Christ’s return on the Last Day because by faith you are in Christ. And while we wait, encourage each other to stay awake holding fast to God’s Word and promises while singing, praying, hearing, and receiving His gifts, together watching and waiting for the glorious return of Jesus Christ, our Lord and King. Amen.

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