

1 Advent
December 1, 2019

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations
of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.
Amen**

Hey, look around...The Hanging of the Greens has started; lights outside, candles in the window, an Advent Wreath, and lights around our Sanctuary are all ways of getting our church in order, in preparation for Advent.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent...

It works the same way for both aspects of Jesus' coming; His first coming, as the Christ-child, born in Bethlehem; and His second coming, as the exalted Savior, reigning over us and all creation. It is like when we expect an honored guest to arrive in our homes; we clean the house, hang our best curtains, and put out our best china, crystal and other special wares. In other words, we roll out the red carpet, to give them a royal welcome. Of course, waiting for them is the hard part.

Having done all the preparation, we're pumped and primed; ready to rock and roll...let the party begin! When our juices are flowing, it's hard to sit and wait, especially when the anticipated moment of arrival is left unspecified.

In our observance of Advent, for example, when we focus on the birth of Jesus, we know from the start that the climax will come on December 25th. Between now and then, we'll read the prophecies of the Old Testament and light another Advent candle each Sunday. Then we'll gather on Christmas Eve to hear the Christmas story and sing the carols; then we'll get up on Christmas morning and open our gifts...If we have been good boys and girls! It's all so predictable...

Not so with the Second Coming.

Jesus could come at any time. He could arrive at this very moment, Come Lord Jesus, or He could be delayed for several millennia. There's just no telling when Jesus will arrive again. As He told his disciples, "no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36)

That makes the waiting doubly hard, and it can lead us to ask, "Is He coming, or not?" The answer lies in the gospel reading for this morning: "Yes, He is coming...at a moment when you least expect Him." So, look for the sign of Noah. That's our cue to knowing that the end is near and that our honored guest is at the door...

What, exactly, is the sign of Noah then? It may not be what you think. In the Old Testament, the story of Noah and the great flood was brought on by the sinfulness of the world. Genesis 6:5 says, "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

The picture that comes to mind is that of wholesale immorality, lewdness, debauchery, hedonism (heedonism) and Bacchanalianism (Bac chan a lee a nism). All to the fullest extent! So, you might think that the sign of Noah has to do with the decadence of the world around us and its preoccupation with sex and violence and every form of lewd behavior; that the world is truly going to hell in a hand basket, it would be a sure sign that the Second Coming is near.

But no, that's **not** what Jesus said

He said, "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark." (Matthew 24:38) As far as Jesus is concerned, it's more than people's sinfulness that is the problem, it's also their complacency, their relative ease and comfort.

Richard Donovan, a Bible Commentator, writes, "Jesus compares the normalcy of their daily lives with the normalcy that will prevail before the Second Coming. Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage!" Who can fault these normal actions? The fault is not that people are doing these things, but they are so caught up in the routine of daily living they take no thought for their spiritual lives. Their problem is not especially 'gross sin' but 'secular indifference,' and 'nonchalance about God.'"

No, it's not the vile nature of the world in which we live that's the problem, it's our indifference. We live as if everything is A-OK, when the rug can be pulled out from underneath us without a moment's notice...

- A downturn in the stock market can wipe out a lifetime of savings. Some may have experienced this in 2008.
- A positive biopsy can nullify all our plans. Oh no, it's cancer.
- A rogue terrorist attack can bring our country to its knees.
- It's happening too often. Many churches even have security guards at the doors.

I know we live in the south, but we are living on thin ice!

Why don't we live as if God were the sole source of our strength and hope for the future? This is what Noah did... I have to say it, Noah was BOLD! Scripture says, "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). He dared to live out of sync with the world around him in order to live in harmony with the Spirit of the living God. You know the story; while the rest of the world went on living as if they were invulnerable, Noah listened to God and obeyed God's Word.

He built an Ark and gathered a pair of every animal and bird, and then he took the birds and the animals into the Ark, along with his family, and shut the door. Can you imagine how the people must have talked about him, taunted him and considered him some sort of religious fanatic or fool? Even to this day, comedians, and others, love to make fun of Noah and the Ark. Yet, who was the wiser?

When the first drops of rain began to fall, the people were oblivious to what was about to happen. They had hardened hearts! Only Noah and his family, and the birds and animals that were with him, would live to tell the story. This is the sign of Noah; calamity, disaster, tragedy, and, these may well be lurking around the corner for us. The end could come at any moment. We must choose this day to walk with God and not follow the ways of the world. We must walk in the path of righteousness and steer clear of the road to perdition.

Did you hear those words of Isaiah, “come, let us walk in the light of the Lord?”

Or, Paul’s words to the Romans, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Or, the words of Jesus, “Therefore you also must be ready.”

Make no mistake about it; now is the time to decide, now is the time to embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and walk in His footsteps. Now is the time to prepare for His coming; tomorrow may be too late.

I read an article recently about a family that could best be described as an “All-American” family. The husband was a good old boy; a hard worker, a faithful husband, a devoted father. Plus, he was community minded. He coached Little League and Pop Warner teams and was an assistant scout master. His wife was a full-time mom, who devoted her time and energy to being a good wife and mother and community volunteer. She attended PTA meetings, sat in the bleachers in all kinds of weather to root for the kids, win or lose, and could always be counted on for a cake or a pie or a few dozen cookies for the bake sale. They had two kids, a boy, sixteen, and a girl, ten. The kids were everything the parents had hoped for; they were clean-cut, respectful of their elders, always quick to say, “Please”, “Thank you”, and “Yes Ma’am” or “Yes Sir” when addressed.

The family came to church, from time to time, but never made a commitment, either to join the church or to profess Jesus Christ as Lord. They were what we might call, “C & E Christians.” They lived by the Golden Rule and the American Way. For all intents and purposes, they had a secular understanding of life; as such, when tragedy struck, they fell apart.

Here’s what happened:

Their son, Tim, wanted to go duck hunting with a friend. He asked his parents and they said, “Sure, it would be fine.” His father offered to let him take his new shotgun. The boys went to a small lake out in the country, got into a little boat, and were paddling out to a duck blind when

the wind came up out of nowhere. The boat capsized. The other boy was able to hang on to the side of the boat, but Tim held on to his father's new shotgun and drowned.

When news reached the family, they turned to the church, and the church members, as we usually do, did all they could to offer comfort, reassurance and hope; but it was too little, too late. Without the strength of an inner, seasoned faith, they were hopelessly ill-prepared to face such the loss. The wife became emotionally distraught, and the husband became angry and bitter; mad at God and the world. Nothing was said about the daughter, but we can only imagine the impact on her. They are all probably still suffering in their grief...

Disaster strikes without warning, and the word to the wise is. Be prepared. Get your priorities straight now, while there's time. Cultivate your relationship with Jesus Christ through daily prayer and Bible study and righteous living. Be like an athlete in training, ready to go into the game on a moment's notice when the coach calls your number.

Remember the sign of Noah...just when everything seems to be going your way, there may well come a clap of thunder and then a flood; so, by the time you feel the first drops of rain, it'll be too late.

There IS great news to take home with you this morning, and to carry with you throughout this season of Advent! The more firmly you are grounded in the sovereignty of God's Word, the stronger your faith.

The more you are on "good speaking terms with the Lord," as an old friend used to say, the more patiently you'll be able to wait on the Lord to come, and the more likely you'll recognize the signs of his coming, and... the more you will feel the peace of His presence. Then, instead of saying, "Is he coming, or not?" You will be able to say to yourself, "Praise God! Alleluia, He...is here!"

BE BOLD!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.