

First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2019

THE UNEXPECTED HOUR

Sunday Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

Introduction

For many of us, Advent was a time of perpetual watchfulness as children. We had Advent calendars with little windows or pockets that must be rushed to every day, to obtain the small treats that were inside. Each day was looked at with much scrutiny: “How many more days until Christmas? What if I miss it?” Everyone was monitored closely to see what came in and out of the house. Each night was met with increasing restlessness, not wanting to sleep or even close your eyes because—what if you miss it? What if you miss the magic? What if you miss the wonder? What if you miss Santa Claus on the rooftop or sneaking presents under your tree?

You watch closely each and every day with wonder.

While this story isn’t relatable for everyone, most of us can relate to a time we were anticipating something. A wedding day, the birth of a baby, retirement, a long-worked-for raise—whatever it might be, we know what it is like to watch in extreme anticipation, waiting.

Our text today is about this type of waiting and watching, never losing focus on what we should have our eyes on: the return of Jesus.

Many of us read this text with the baggage of fear, and there’s some validity to that because the preceding verses are a bit gloomy—to say the least. There is definitely a sign of caution here to not be distracted, to stay the course, but the message is not one of fear. It’s ultimately one of hope: that God keeps his promises, that Christ will return, and that if we stay the course, if we are watchful and ready, we will see this hope fulfilled.

Body

1. Focus on what we are called to.

- a. This text reveals a distractedness that can consume all of us. Instead of staying focused on Christ, sharing Christ, and living the life Christ has called us to, other things rush in to distract us.
 - i. The Gospel of Matthew has an overarching theme of sharing the gospel with others. This theme is revealed in the Great Commission at the end of the book, Matthew 28:19.
 - ii. We also see this theme illustrated in the parable of the sheep and goats in 25:31-46, where we learn that the call of those following Christ is to a life lived in love and compassion for those around us.
 - iii. We have a call to join the mission of God in the world.

2. Losing Focus

- a. The context for this passage reveals several parables that illustrate the distracted nature of humanity.
 - i. The parable of the ten bridesmaids.

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- ii. The parable of the talents.
 - iii. The parable of the sheep and the goats.
- b. We also see this distractedness in verses 37–39 of our text today, in the reference to the time of Noah.
- i. The issue was not that the people were marrying, eating, and drinking. The issue was that they allowed those things to distract them from their coming destruction and, ultimately, the opportunity for hope and salvation.
 - ii. They were caught off guard because they forgot about God.
 - iii. They were not paying attention to the signs around them that were pointing them toward salvation; instead, they were focused on other things.
- c. We also are a distracted people.
- i. While we may know that Christ is coming, we often allow other things to consume our time.
 - ii. We sometimes forget our call to compassion and love because of these distractions.
 - iii. This time of year, we can look at obvious distractions in our lives.
 - 1. Busyness is a problem throughout the year, but this season can feel particularly busy.
 - 2. Materialism is an issue especially as we near Christmastime. Shiny things are alluring, and we can sometimes view both getting and giving as a way to be fulfilled; yet both can serve as distractions.
 - 3. Keeping up appearances—the way we, and our homes, look to others—can become a serious distraction in our lives.
 - 4. Family can be a distraction, even though family is really good! Much like the people in Noah’s time weren’t wrong for getting married and celebrating, we aren’t wrong for spending time with family, but sometimes even good things like our family can become the focus of the season over Jesus.
 - iv. There are myriad things that distract us from looking for Christ in our lives and in the world around us.

3. Regaining Focus

- a. Advent is a season for regaining our focus.
- i. While this might feel like an odd text for Advent, it is appropriate.
 - 1. We are reminded to be mindful of the distractions in our life and remember the birth of Christ.
 - 2. Each week we are called to look back to Christ’s birth and remember.
 - 3. We are also reminded each week to look ahead to Christ’s return.
 - ii. Just like the anticipation we had as children, looking forward to Christmas day or another important day, we are reminded to look forward for Christ’s return.
 - 1. What distractions do you need to remove from your life to regain focus on Christ?
 - 2. What do you need to add to your life to regain focus on Christ?
- b. Those of us who anticipate the return of Christ are hopeful.
- i. We know that the hardships and trials we face now will be made right at Christ’s return.
 - ii. We are confident of the ways the already/not yet kingdom of God is at work.
 - 1. When we anticipate Christ’s return, we look for and see where the Holy Spirit is already at work in the world.
 - 2. We partner with the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, in much the same way Noah partnered with God in building the ark.
 - iii. The fear in the text is never for those who trust in the Lord. It’s always for those who don’t.

Conclusion

Advent is the new year in the church. New years are often a time for resolutions and for thinking of ways we want to improve. We don't always think of Advent as a season of reflection and renewal, but what if we shifted our thinking? What if we found a way to reduce distractions, to simplify things, and to focus on remembering the coming of Christ and anticipating his return? How might we be transformed by that, and how might the world be transformed by our faithful witness of watching and waiting with hope?