

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
November 28, 2010**

Advent 1

Matthew 24:36-41

Keep An Eye on the Prize!

1. Missing Warning Signs
2. Refocus on those Signs

Hymns: #23, #26, #6

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

Matthew 24:36-41

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 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; 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. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

"It's hard to be sympathetic for the stupid." Do you think there is any truth to that fairly callous phrase? I would say that it is a common belief in our culture today. All you have to do is take a look at the popularity of TV shows like America's Funniest Home Videos or Wipeout. Those shows are built on the premise that people will laugh at the hurt that people's lack of thinking puts them through. Log onto youtube and the videos with the most hits are those that focus on lapses in commonsense. It is easy to laugh when we see those videos because it is hard to be sympathetic when someone appears to go against every warning sign of common sense only to pay the painful price.

As I read through the lessons this week in preparation for the sermon, something new occurred to me as I thought about these accounts of the flood. What struck me as I was reading Genesis and Jesus' lesson in

Matthew was this: I don't know if I've ever been overly sympathetic towards the thousands and thousands of people that were overcome by the violent unleashing of water that God sent upon the earth.

Instead, I read through the account of the flood with the same kind of attitude I have when I watch a painful youtube blooper. Rather than being sympathetic, I say, "What ignorance! How could they be so dumb?"

The words from Genesis show this man named Noah building a boat. Of course, this wasn't a normal boat. It was gigantic, bigger than anything anyone had ever seen. And the strangest thing is that he wasn't really building it near any body of water. You can bet that if this had been going on in today's modern world, somebody would have set up one of those live internet feeds so that people could tune in and watch as this monstrosity of an ark was put together. You could bet that on that video, especially at the start, you would have seen intrigued person after intrigued person coming up to Noah asking him what this construction project was all about. And I guarantee you would have seen the same reaction from every single one as Noah patiently repeated what God had decreed would happen. You would have seen people doubled over in laughter as Noah preached to them that God was going to end the world with a flood in 120 years. You would have seen them scoff as Noah said that they better turn from their sinful ways and repent. Finally, you would have seen Noah get back to work as those people, one after the next, ignored the warning signs and went on their way back to their lives of sin.

But the real youtube moment would have come when the door of the ark was finally sealed up. On that video, we would have seen a few people laughing as Noah sat in this ark on dry land in the middle of a dry place. But then, with mocking laughter still on their faces, those people would suddenly disappear as the water rushed in. They were so close to safety, but too hardheaded to go in. They missed all of the warning

signs: A giant ark, a parade of gathering animals, a preacher of righteousness. Really, it was very sad.

However, what makes me lack sympathy is what I think I know about those people. They were horribly heathen. "Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts were only evil all the time." (Gen. 6:5) Their actions caused the Lord to grieve that he had made them and his heart was filled with pain. How bad must they have been? They must've been so wicked. I can't imagine how engrossed you would have to be in immorality to choose to ignore such obvious words and images of warning. They were completely oblivious to the warning signs and as they paid the ultimate price, it is easy for us, at least it's easy for me, to say, "Those mockers got what they deserved." That is the thought that I often have as I read the account of the flood in Genesis.

However, I said something new struck me as I read these accounts this past week. What struck me were Jesus' words in Matthew. What I see when I picture the flood are people who are washed away as they are engaging in every type of evil, immoral sin that could be thought of. With that picture, it is hard to be sympathetic. However, what Jesus tells us blinded the people from seeing all the warning signs was something much less conspicuous. He says, "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; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away." What Jesus tells us is that everyday life got in the way. The people did not listen to Noah's words of warning because they were too busy taking care of the everyday essentials. Eating and drinking is the sustenance of life. For life to continue day after day, food and water have to be consumed. Marriage is the way that life is carried on for generations. For life to continue, babies need to be born. Jesus tells us that they were so focused on taking care of theirs, that they couldn't look up and see what was really going on. The days of their lives had been numbered. Noah and his ark proclaimed this very clearly. There was no need to carry on life because life would soon be over. But instead of

turning their focus to repentance and getting ready for the end, they continued to work and eat and raise families. They kept their eyes focused on the here and now until one day they looked up and the waters were there to engulf them. It was the end.

Jesus' description of the days before the flood struck me, because it put all of those people in a different setting. Jesus' words create a scene that is hard to be callous to because it is a scene that is hard to distance myself from. No longer do I see blatant, immoral sinners being washed away, I see normal people (mind you, they are people who were sinners!), but normal people who simply aren't ready. I see people who are living their lives focused on their families and friends. I see people who are scrambling to take care of their fields and flocks. I see people who are looking to set things up for the future. I see people worrying about what to cook for dinner and where to hunt and gather next. Basically, I see people who are just like me that were caught unready by that flood. As I look back at this scene, it is easy to see myself there in the days of Noah carrying on in my life. I can see myself as one of those people making plans, doing my job, worrying about bills and loans, trying to get this done and that accomplished. I'm not so sure I wouldn't have been one of the men telling Noah that I didn't have time to put off the "important" things in life so that I could get ready for this "flood."

And that is scary, because Jesus tells us quite clearly that another devastation is about to come. Look through the Gospels and observe how much time Jesus spent preaching on the subject of the end of the world. There is no denying that Christ's second coming is certainly near. Are you ready for it? Or do you have both of your eyes focused on your everyday life? Like those people in Noah's day, is there too much going on here that you have to stay committed to? Jobs, marriages, kids and their activities, bills, home projects, entertainment. All of those things are very important, maintaining them leaves you ready for your upcoming years. But do they turn into excuses to not be at church as often as you could be? Do they become reasons to skip your daily family devotion? Are the extra events added in place of a daily Bible

reading and prayer? Are all those things, which prepare you for life 5...10...15 years down the road, leaving you unready for the coming of Christ? Would you be comfortable in your readiness if Christ came right now? Our focus on everyday life often leaves us without either eye on what is ahead.

But our comfort and encouragement, in this case anyways, is that Christ is not here yet. That means that for each one of us, our time of grace continues. God lovingly gives each of us more time to repent for our lack of focus and readiness. He graciously grants us opportunities to grow in the assurance of our forgiveness. God is giving all of us a little more time to be prepared for his coming.

We do that by staying focused on what is ahead. In driver's Ed, there is an old rule that they teach that is fundamental for good driving. "Keep your eyes ahead." Young drivers get into trouble when they fail to heed that advice. Look down at the road right in front and you swerve all over the road. Look to the sides and the dangers are obvious. But as you look ahead, you drive safely to your destination, still being able to manage everything else with your peripherals.

The same is true for those preparing for the Kingdom of God. We get in all kinds of trouble when we don't look ahead. If we become focused on the pressures of everyday life that are right in front of us, we dangerously swerve on our way toward our destination. If we look toward all the temptations that are around us, the dangers are obvious. But if we keep our eyes focused on Christ and the glories of his heaven that are up ahead in our futures, we are still able to manage everything that we need to along the way. We remain focused by studying God's Word as often as we can. We make instruction in that Word the priority in our lives. We long to be strengthened by the Lord's Supper as often as it is available. We pray for the Holy Spirit to be our guide along the way.

With our eyes always focused on Christ's second coming, we can be confident that we will not be caught by surprise when he comes in all of his glory. We will be ready and waiting like Noah was on the day of the great flood. We will be raised up to eternal

salvation because of Christ's perfect life and death for us. Christ has made us eternally ready. With that assurance, we can cry out the ever-ready call, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. Amen.