

Keep Watch!

1Thessalonians 5:1-11

The Last Sunday of the Church Year, November 25, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The New Testament calls Noah a herald of righteousness, but when you read the Old Testament it does not mention Noah preaching anywhere. The only way that Noah was a herald of righteousness was by his own righteous living and by the ark that he built. Other than that the judgment fell on the world at the time of Noah at a time when no one expected it. People were getting married, going to work, eating, drinking, and doing all of the ordinary things of life when suddenly the flood came and swept them all away. The only warning they had was a boat built by Noah.

The same was true when God's judgment fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels whom God sent to Sodom and Gomorrah did not preach. They did not set up a revival tent in the town square of Sodom. The reason that they were there was to check to see if the things which had been reported to the Lord about Sodom and Gomorrah were true and to rescue Lot and his family from the midst of the judgment. No one in Sodom or Gomorrah had any warning that the judgment was coming. They had no warning except that which was written in their hearts and that which was written in the creation around them. They continued doing the ordinary things of their lives which included their wickedness and then suddenly fire fell from heaven and swept them all away.

And even when God's people have warning the judgment seems to fall swiftly and unexpectedly. How many times did God warn His people against idolatry in the Old Testament? How many prophets did He send to preach against their idolatry and oppression of the poor and shedding of blood? Time and time again God warned them and then suddenly the Assyrian army was at the gate and took them all away.

And that was only northern Israel. Southern Israel saw northern Israel swept away in God's judgment by the Assyrian army and they continued in their sin. God sent them more warnings and then suddenly the Babylonian army was at the gate and took them all away.

God's judgment falls unexpectedly. Even when we have warning it falls unexpectedly. It falls totally unexpectedly upon the unbelievers who do not believe that such judgment is even coming. And even though we who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ know that He is coming, just as ancient Israel knew that the exile was coming because God had warned them so much when it came it seemed like a surprise.

It is like a pregnant woman. She knows that she is pregnant. She knows when her due date is, but knowing those things does not reduce the feeling of surprise when the moment comes. Unless you are inducing labor, the child may come early. He may come late. And even though you know he is coming, you do not know when he is coming.

And so the Lord will return. He will return again in glory. Folks, if He was able to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven, rest assured He can come again in glory riding on the clouds of heaven. He can come with all of His Father's holy angels. He can come in such a way

that those who are alive when He comes will be able to see Him no matter where they live on this globe.

And He has promised to return, but He has not told us when. He has kept that to Himself. In fact in His humility He told that not even He knew when He would return, but only the Father knew. Now that our Lord is no longer in His humility and is now in His glory I imagine that the Father has now revealed to our Lord the date.

And you and I will go about our daily tasks. We will get up in the morning and do our duties. We will go to the field or go to work. We will teach our children their lessons and prepare them to get married. They will get married and raise families of their own. We will enjoy our grandchildren and plan for our retirement. We will make sure that our retirement portfolios are properly diversified. We will plan for next year's planting and harvest. In fact we have already done things to get ready. I will plan for Lent and Easter next year. We will get ready for the next school year and practice our layups for when basketball season begins.

And then suddenly like a thief in the night, the Lord will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. For those in the darkness it will be a sudden destruction. And the only warning the unbelievers have is the creation that proclaims the glory of God each and every day and the way in which you lived in front of them.

All of you are not in dark about this. All that I have just described has been made plain to you. The Lord has told you. His apostles have told you. Preachers since you were little have told you. They have all told you that the Lord is coming in power and glory. They have all told you that He comes to judge the living and the dead, after the dead are raised of course. They have all told you that the unbelievers will not escape the wrath that He will bring. They have all told you that the day and the hour are unknown. You are not in the dark. God has not left you in the dark.

You are people of the day. You are people of the light. You are people who are in the know. And since you are in the know, like ancient Israel, you should know to put away your idols and sins. Those who persist in their idols and sins are in the dark. They do not believe that the Lord is coming. They do not believe that He is coming for judgment. They believe that His grace can be taken for granted and trifled with. They do not believe that His grace is transformative. They are in the dark. But you are not in the dark. Therefore put away the works of darkness.

Let us be sober and not drunk with the wine of sin and evil. Let us put on the breastplate of faith and love and the only way to put on the breastplate of faith and love is to involve ourselves with those things which give us faith and love.

What gives you faith? The word and the sacraments give you faith! If you want to put on the breastplate of faith, then involve yourself in God's word and sacraments. Come to Divine Service. Receive His Word in the Divine Service as I preach it and as it is read to you and you speak it in the liturgy. Receive His word in your homes in daily Bible readings with your family and on your own. Come regularly to the Divine Service to eat Christ's body and drink His blood. Keep yourself mindful of your baptism into Christ. These things give you faith. And

faith saves. God testifies over and over again that faith saves. If you want to put on the breastplate of faith then involve yourselves in the things of faith so that no matter when the Lord decides to return, you will be ready.

Then with faith do the works of love. Faith is never without love. Do the works of love every day. The most common works of love are the works of love that you do in your daily vocations. That is the easiest and most profitable way to love. Love your children by feeding them and rearing them and teaching the truth about God. Love your spouse by respecting him if he is your husband and by laying down your life for her if she is your wife. Love your parents by honoring them. Love your neighbor by performing your daily work with the utmost attention to honesty and integrity. Do not do shoddy work. Do not produce shoddy produce. Fulfill your obligations and the promises that you have made. This is the breastplate of love.

Put on the helmet of salvation because God has not destined you to destruction. Rather He has already destined you to be in possession of salvation. He has done this through Jesus Christ. And what makes Jesus Christ so special that God has given you salvation through Him. He is the one who died on your behalf. By His death He has atoned for your sins. And it is that atonement that prepares you for the final judgment when He returns again in glory. Without His death, you are still in your sins and sudden destruction will come upon you. With His death you may put on the breastplate of faith and love and be prepared for His final coming when He comes again in glory.

And since you have been made ready, what is there to do while you wait? Well, aside from love as I have said before encourage one another. Build one another up. Encourage one another to lay aside sin. Encourage one another to continue to love in the callings which you have. Encourage one another in one another's faith, that this faith in Jesus and this use of the Word and of the sacraments is not vain, that these things are actually real and they do what the Bible says they will do.

But I know all of you do that already. You already go to one another's funerals and share one another's grief. You already look out for each other and discourage one another's sins. I know that you encourage one another in your faith because you are all here this Sunday just as you will be here the next one to do the same. You pray for each other. You read the Bible together in your homes. I know these things. I know that you are doing it.

Keep up the good work! And all the more as you see the day approaching.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.