

Advent 1 A Sermon
Matthew 24:36-44
November 27, 2022

“Who Are You Waiting For?”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

³⁶“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

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About 30 minutes into the 2014 film, *Left Behind*, shoppers in a mall are shocked as the children in their care suddenly vanish, leaving only their clothes behind. At the same time, passengers on a transatlantic flight are startled to vigilance by unexpected turbulence and begin to notice that children and many adults on the flight have disappeared. Playing the pilot, actor Nicholas Cage becomes frantic when he realizes that his copilot too has mysteriously evaporated into thin air. Back on the ground, driverless cars begin crashing into buildings, planes fall from the sky, and looting begins as utter pandemonium is unleashed upon the bewildered masses. Where did the vanished go and what will happen to those who were left behind?

It doesn't sound so different from what Jesus foretells in our reading from Matthew's gospel, does it? People will be going about their merry business as they did in the days of Noah before the floods came, sweeping them into oblivion. He says that two farmers will be working in the field when one is suddenly taken. Two women will be grinding meal when one is suddenly taken. He says that it will be like going to bed one night, only to realize the next morning that a thief has been in the house robbing you while you were asleep. So, be vigilant. Be watchful. Be ready. No one knows the day and no one knows the hour of the coming of the Son of Man.

Do these words make you nervous, even scare you? I think they're meant to. This is apocalyptic literature at its finest. Apocalyptic literature is meant to upend reality, to disorient, to confuse, and to intrigue. I think that's why some folks, so enamored with biblical allusions to the end of time, practically make a hobby of decoding the images, numbers, and obscure references while attempting to pinpoint exactly when the end will draw nigh. And yet, the Jesus of Matthew's gospel warns, "about that day and hour no one knows . . . for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

It's no accident, I think, that these foreboding words are prescribed for the very first day in a new liturgical year, the first day of the season of Advent. The word advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which literally means "arrival." Truth be told, we think we know what's coming, don't we? In fact, we think we know where it will arrive, when it will arrive, and what it will mean for us and for our world when it finally does arrive.

In 28 days, we will celebrate arrival of the Christ Child in a lowly Bethlehem stable—a teacher-preacher-healer-savior that will surely bring peace on earth and goodwill to all. We have four weeks to prepare and that means just four weeks to decorate our homes, shop for and wrap gifts, mail Christmas cards, complete our holiday baking, plan menus for the feasts that will mark our celebrations, and attend to the myriad tiny details that ensure another perfect Christmas for our loved ones. The arrival

we're really waiting for is, well, for lack of a better word, predictable—safe—and perfectly on schedule.

However, this other arrival described in our reading is anything but safe! And it's certainly not predictable or scheduled, so it's probably our first inclination to write this text off as just too scary or just too weird to take seriously. After all, people have been waiting for nearly 2000 years and it still hasn't happened. Why should we get too worked up about it now?

Matthew's Jesus paints an unsettling picture of a business-as-usual kind of world where, as in the days of Noah, no one was prepared for the coming flood. This Jesus urges his followers not to be among the unprepared—to live each day as though it was the day that everything would change. This Jesus prevails on his hearers the absolute necessity of being ready for the unpredictable arrival that could occur at any moment. "Be ready," he says. This is not business as usual. So, I wonder, what would being ready look like to Jesus?

If we use Jesus' own life and teachings as an example, being ready probably looks like living and loving like Jesus did; looks like continuing his work; looks like building the Kingdom (as we've explored the last couple of weeks). For Jesus, being ready, being prepared, probably looks like living and loving and serving as he did. If that's what we're up to, I'm guessing we've got nothing to worry about from this Second Coming.

There are Christians, lots of them, in fact, who actively wait for a literal second coming of Jesus of Nazareth whom, they believe, will right the wrongs of the world and establish heaven's realm in our midst. While some wait for Jesus, I believe that the Jesus Matthew's author describes would be waiting for us—for his followers, his church, his living body—to be living and loving and serving heaven's realm into being in our world, right now.

I wonder if, by urging his followers to live like the arrival of the Son of Man could occur at any moment, Jesus actually hoped to inspire them to

live in such a way as to usher in his vision of the realm of heaven—the one he lived to proclaim and died to save.

I wonder, if there is truly to be a Second Coming of Christ, will it actually occur when the church, Christ's living body, finally wakes up to the truth that we are to be Jesus made flesh, present and active *in* the world, for the sake *of* the world? Until the church takes seriously Jesus' commission to be his body in the world, living as his body in the world, are folks just waiting for his arrival in vain?

What do you think, I wonder? Is this text just too scary or just too weird to take seriously? Are we waiting for the literal Second Coming of Jesus of Nazareth? Do we really need to worry about vanishing coworkers or thieves in the night? Or, could Jesus—could the world—be waiting for us? Could it be that if the wrongs of the world are to be righted, if heaven's realm is to come on earth it will be our hands as Jesus' body that build it, our minds as Christ's mind that work out the sticky details, our hearts as the Sacred Heart that love it into being?

Maybe *we* are who *we've* been waiting for all along. Maybe we are who we've been waiting for all along... If that's the case, our preparation for Christmas doesn't have to be just about remembering the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago. It can be preparation for the arrival of something new. It can be filled with excitement and expectation and hope and it can motivate us to live and love and serve like Jesus in the world with renewed energy and purpose. It can signal the arrival of the one the world's been waiting for all along—us—Jesus' living body loving and serving heaven's realm into being, for the sake of our world.

Hope of the World, may it be so. Amen.

