

“DON’T LOOK; HE’S COMING”

Matthew 24:15-28

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity (OT: First Series; NT: Series I)

November 13, 2016

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 24, verses 15 through 28. It is on page 701 of the pew Bible.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus is answering two different questions posed to him by the disciples, and you can find them in the beginning of chapter 24. Jesus had prophesied the destruction of the temple (24:2). So the disciples asked him when this would happen, and they also asked about the sign of Jesus’ coming and the end of the age (24:3). So in our gospel lesson for today, Jesus begins by speaking of the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem. This was fulfilled in 70 AD—about 40 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then he tells them about the tribulation that will last until he returns. And finally Jesus transitions to his return and the end of all things.

So please stand for the gospel. From Matthew 24, we begin reading at verse 15.

¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
You may be seated.

Jesus is coming.

Dear saints, this is glorious news. The King of heaven and earth is coming!

This is what we heard in the gospel lesson, as well as in the epistle lesson from 1 Thessalonians. Jesus is coming, and all the world will see him. This is good news.

The Scriptures tell us about this. They do not tell us everything we *want* to know—like when exactly it will happen—but they do tell us everything we *need* to know. And they tell us what we need to know in very clear terms. The Scriptures are very clear that Jesus will return. He will

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come the same way he ascended—on a cloud. His coming will be very public. Nobody will miss it. He will raise the dead—even those who have long since turned to dust. He will judge the living and the dead. He will transform his believing saints into his own image, and he will take us home to the kingdom he has prepared for us. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.

This clear teaching can be summarized even further with the words of the Nicene Creed: “He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.”

If all the various end times teachers confuse you, just ignore them and believe the clear teaching of the Scriptures. Jesus is coming. Jesus will raise the dead. Jesus will judge. And Jesus will take his believing saints into his eternal kingdom. This is what we need to know, and the Scriptures are very clear about it. And so we should be watching and waiting, because Jesus could return at any time.

And we should make every effort to live a life worthy of the kingdom we are looking for. Of course, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy. It is only the blood of Jesus that makes us worthy. But we should still strive to live a life worthy of the kingdom we are waiting for. So here’s a little brain activity you can do this week. As you go about the daily activities of your life, ask yourself this simple, but revealing, question: “Is this what I want to be doing when Jesus returns?” And if the answer to that question is, “No,” you probably shouldn’t be doing it. I won’t even try to give you any specific examples of what you don’t want to be doing at that moment, because I am quite sure you can already think of several things you do that would be inappropriate for that time.

Now, I don’t mean to say that all the activities of our lives need to be “hyper-spiritual.” We don’t need to frantically plead, non-stop, from this moment until Jesus returns, with every lost sinner to repent. Their conversion is not our work. It is the Holy Spirit’s. The Holy Spirit may use us in that work. He seems to always use someone, but it is ultimately his work. That means it is okay to take a break to go to sleep, or eat, or brush your teeth, or go to work and do your job, or play with your kids, or rake your leaves. All of these things are good works that God intends for us to do while we enjoy this creation and wait for the new one.

Someone once asked Martin Luther what he would do if he knew Jesus was coming back the next day. And he said, “I would plant a tree.” It’s kind of a surprising answer. We kind of expect that this reformer who cared so deeply about the Gospel would make once last effort to preach the Gospel to lost sinners. But Luther had already preached the Gospel to pretty much everyone he could find. He knew their rejection was not his fault. And should they repent and believe, he also knew that was not his doing. Repentance is always the Holy Spirit’s work. God knows what he is doing, and he will return when the time is right. We are simply called to be faithful in the various callings God has given us.

That faithfulness may include preaching the Gospel. Or it may include planting a tree or putting the leftovers in the fridge so someone can eat them tomorrow—if there is a tomorrow.

Luther was simply trying to illustrate that so many of the various mundane activities we do, are the very works God desires us to do. And if Jesus were to return, what could be better than to be found doing the very thing God put man on this earth to do in the first place—tending his garden (Gen. 2:15)?

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So whether our daily activities seem hyper-spiritual or extraordinarily mundane, we are to live with the constant expectation that Jesus may return at any moment, because he will. And when he does return, may we all be found faithful.

So if Jesus is returning—and he most certainly is—that sounds like a pretty big deal. And it’s fascinating to think about it. Someday—we don’t know when, but someday—Jesus will return and the world as we know it will cease. A new and better world will be created. As Christians, we look forward to this as our final deliverance. I won’t be sick anymore. Neither will you. Every last bit of evil, pain, sin, and death will be gone. Jesus will come to take us to the new creation he has prepared for us. So we kind of want to know what that day will be like.

If you look around in Christian bookstores or on Christian television channels, you will soon discover there are many, many different opinions. But the problem with all these opinions is just that—they’re just opinions.

One of these opinions—and this is the only opinion I’ll deal with today—one of these opinions is that when Jesus returns, it will be a secret and silent event. No one will even see Jesus, but all of the sudden, all the Christians in the world will suddenly vanish. And because of this sudden vanishing, the world will descend into chaos.

If you have paid any attention to modern end times teachers, I am sure you have heard of this opinion. But it’s false.

I mention this false opinion because it can have a harmful effect. First, if you believe this theory, you end up getting scared every time someone leaves the house without telling you. You look around the house, and when you find no one there, you start to worry you got left behind. Then you find a note on the counter saying that mom went to the grocery store. But Jesus is quite clear that when he returns, no one is going to miss it.

The second harmful effect of this theory—and this one is probably more serious—is that it can actually make people think they will have a second chance *after* Jesus returns. If the world doesn’t end when Jesus returns, then we all get a little more time to repent. Even if life might be a little more difficult, at least there’s a second chance. But again, the Scriptures are quite clear: when Jesus comes back, that’s the end (1 Cor. 15:23-24). He will judge the living and the dead.

So when Jesus comes back, it’s not going to be a secret thing. It is correct to say that Christians will be *raptured*. The epistle lesson from 1 Thessalonians says, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). That’s what we mean when we talk about the rapture. But it’s not going to be a secret thing. It will be a very public thing. Right before this verse we read, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). This, by the way, is not figurative language. These are clear words. And they are to be believed. When Jesus returns, it will be loud. You will hear about it. “A cry of command ... the voice of an archangel ... the trumpet of God.” The whole world will notice. And it won’t be characterized by people magically disappearing. It will be the opposite. Dead people will be climbing out of their graves—lots of them. This will not be a secret thing. People are going to notice.

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And Jesus tells us the same thing in the gospel lesson. When he comes, you’re going to know.

He warns us about false christs and false prophets. They may even perform great signs and wonders. But we are not to believe them. They might say, “Look! Jesus is over here,” or, “Look! He’s over there.” But Jesus says, “Don’t look.” He says, **“Do not go out. ... Do not believe it”** (24:26). If anyone ever says, “Look! Jesus is back. He’s over here,” do not look, because Jesus *is* coming back, and when he comes back, you will know it. No one is going to miss it, and you will not sleep through it. Dead people won’t even be able to sleep through it.

Jesus says it will be as noticeable as lightning in the sky.

When you are outside during a lightning storm, you notice it. If you are facing west, and a giant bolt of lightning crashes behind you in the east, you still notice. So Jesus says his return will be as obvious as a giant crash of lightning that illuminates the entire sky. It will be impossible to miss. Dead people won’t even sleep through it.

So we should be watching and waiting all the time. We should constantly be ready for that bright and glorious day. But we don’t have to go looking for it. We don’t have to search for it. You’re not going to miss it. Believers and unbelievers alike will see Jesus descending. Not everyone will be happy about it, but everyone will see it.

It’s interesting to think about and wonder about it. Maybe it will happen during church. Maybe we’ll be asleep. Maybe you’ll be sleeping during church. Maybe I’ll instantly be 10 years younger and 40 pounds lighter.

And what will it look like? Will everyone in the world see Jesus coming at the same time? How is that even possible?

We can tie our brains in knots trying to figure out what exactly it will be like, or we could just listen to Jesus’ words. **“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”** (24:27). We’re not going to miss it. Nobody is. Somehow—I don’t know how—but somehow, it will be as sudden and visible as lightning. We won’t miss it.

The trumpet will sound. The dead will be raised. And then any of us who are left alive until that day—along with all who had fallen asleep in Jesus, but will now be alive again—together we will all see Jesus with our very own eyes. We will meet him in the clouds. And we will be with our Lord Jesus Christ forever in his new creation.

Dear saints, Jesus is coming. And this is glorious news. The King of heaven and earth is coming! This is our blessed hope.

As Christians we are promised deliverance from sin, death, and the devil through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are promised victory.

But sometimes our lives don’t look all that victorious. Sometimes we are overcome by temptation. Sin seems just as powerful as ever. Death obviously continues to be a problem for us. And when we see all this, it kind of seems like the devil gets his way—at least sometimes. For now, the Christian life is marked by suffering. And why should we expect anything

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different? We call Jesus’ bloody and gory death a victory. We worship a king whose coronation took place on an ancient instrument of execution while he wore a crown of thorns.

And even though he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, his Church still remains in a world that rejected him. And the same devil that tempted him is the same devil that tempts us. So our Christian lives are marked by suffering.

But Jesus assures us that it will not always be this way. He has promised to return. Jesus is coming. Jesus will raise the dead. Jesus will judge. And Jesus will take his believing saints into his eternal kingdom. Then we will see and experience our redemption. The King of heaven and earth is coming. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.