

The First Sunday of Advent: Holy Trinity Church: November 27, 2022

Matthew 24: 36-44

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!

Have you ever noticed that right before a storm is about to hit the birds go silent? Suddenly, an eerie blanket of quiet descends all around you, and you know something ominous is going to happen. For us it could mean a storm, a hurricane, or some other natural disaster. For all our gifts as human beings, we are the last creatures on earth it seems to sense when something momentous is coming to pass.

Scientists believe that this is because animals have a better sense of sound and vibration than we do. They can sense when the barometric pressure drops or when low pressure systems are coming, and they react appropriately. Sharks swim to deeper waters. Animals go into hiding. Bees go into their hives. And the birds stop singing.

Some of us do sense humidity changes. Some human beings can develop sinus headaches when pressure systems drop. But most of us are taken by surprise, until we see the sky darken and the trees begin to sway in the wind. Then, we suddenly notice the “calm before the storm.” We depend instead upon weather reports, science that can pay attention for us to help us know what’s coming and plan for its arrival. Even then, we cannot predict everything or how it will run its course. Our tropical storms are most dangerous, partly because of their unpredictability factor.

Those who live in the south of the United States, especially in Florida with hurricanes seasons can come all the way up to New England. On the west, the coast of California with its’ earthquakes, and its’ ferocious forest fires in other states of our country. Rhode Island is particularly prone to a hurricane season. We know that loss of life and property damage happens, and we must get on with our lives. We cannot live each day in fear of an impending disaster. And yet, we must also be prepared. Downtown Providence installed hurricane-proof doors, windows are boarded up and many have back-up generators. They build shelters and buy flood insurance. Communities install water blockages. Families make sure to stock extra food, clothing, and water. They keep first aid kits handy. They work out a “what if” evacuation plan. They educate each other on the safest place in the house to gather. They keep

flashlights and blankets on hand, and they consult helpful “how-to” lists on how to keep their families safe in the event of an emergency.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, when things grow silent and the sky grows dark, their plan goes into action. Some disasters are even more unpredictable –volcano eruptions, earthquakes, meteors, solar flares, tsunamis, sinkholes.

Some things can happen suddenly, taking even the most prepared off guard.

Do you remember the game used to play when you were young around the table? We called it “musical chairs.” A group of people would assemble around a circle with only a certain count of chairs. The music would play, and the group would walk around the circle. When the music suddenly stopped, all would scramble to take a seat. Those who couldn’t get to a chair in time were cast “out” of the circle. This would occur, gradually removing chairs until only one would be left. He or she would be the “winner.”

Music can also be used in a form of a gag called “Musicalis Interruptus,” in which a concert or song may be going on, only to suddenly stop and be interrupted by someone who will address a person of honor or someone to be “roasted” who is taken (hopefully) by surprise. Both make for fun musical games. But think about it. Music and sound, when these stops and goes silent, always signals that something new and different is about to happen. When the

orchestra goes silent just before the play is about to begin. When the “tuning” stops for the instrumentalists to get ready for the first piece. When the hymn stops and the call to worship commences.

When the soundtrack stops, and you know something in that movie is going to happen. When the music stops, something is about to end, and something else is about to begin. The American slang idiom for “when the music stops” means “you don’t get another chance.” You are all out of extensions. You have come to the end of the road. You can get the gist of this idiom in a song by Don McClean, “American Pie,” in a tribute to the death of Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, Richie Valens and others in the plane crash. The line, “when the music died,” is a swan song to the sudden and untimely demise of the rock and roll heroes of the 1950s. These kinds of events take us entirely by surprise. In fact, it’s the element of surprise that causes us so much grief and shock. And yet, we know, life can change suddenly and unexpectedly, and while we need not live our lives “waiting for it,” we do need always to be aware of it, do what we can to ensure our best safety measures and try to live our best lives every day, grateful for the time we’ve been given.

In a sense, this is what Jesus is explaining to his disciples in Matthew’s gospel chapter 24; verses 36-44 today. No one knows, not even Jesus, when He will

return one day, when the “music” of our world, the chatter and the livingness, will come to an end. We cannot live in perpetual fear, paralysis, or anxiety, waiting for it to happen. We must not try to figure it out with all kinds of plans, diagrams, predictions, or assurances. But we do need to live our best lives, in gratitude for the time we have been given, in prayer to God and in worship to the One who makes our lives possible. We need to live into our faith, assured that when Jesus comes and the world changes, when the music stops, we have done our best as human beings on this earth, then we have loved well, we have shared well, we have forgiven much, we have shown mercy and we have shown to understanding to all we meet.

Jesus compares the finality of the earth with the flood of Noah. Life went on in the usual ways right up until it didn't. No one knew. No one will know this time either. But like Noah, we can remain faithful, trust God, and live our best lives. We cannot plan. But we can prepare ourselves, our hearts, our minds, and our spirits for the coming of the Lord. We can “stay awake” to the presence of the Spirit around us and stay in tune with our Lord Jesus Christ and his direction for our lives. We can be prepared and ready for a storm to come, even if we don't know when it will hit, even if we don't know if it will sweep our way or not.

More than this we cannot do. More than God' does not expect us to do.

Here is the challenge today, when we enter a time of “advent,” a time in which we remind ourselves to focus on God and God’s coming Son. This is a time of spiritual alertness, in which we engage ourselves even more deeply in our relationship with Jesus. We as human beings can be absentminded and distract able by the ways of the world and our own, tempestuous lives. We can get caught up in conflicts, stubbornness, and petty things. We can lose our focus and allow the flame of our passion for Christ burn low. We can get “busy” with all kinds of superficial things. Advent is like an alarm clock that wakes us up and reminds us to pay attention to the coming of the day, to enjoy the music of God’s voice in our lives and the chatter from the streets below. For one day, the music will stop, the world will grow silent, and a new day will begin. We have one chance to live our lives in this world. Only one! We don’t get another chance to make amends or to show each other love once the music stops. So, take heart this day. Wake up your holy spirit, your soul to the truth of Jesus the Christ. Stir up your heart to the love all around you and the beauty of this amazing world. Be a part of God’s symphonic, relational creation. And dance as though the music could stop at any moment or go on forever. AMEN!