



2nd Sunday of Advent – December 9-10-11, 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Advent Means: It's About Time

1. Time to repent 2. Time to lead a Godly life

Sermon Text 2 Peter 3: 8-14

8But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 11Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 14So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless & at peace with him.

Dear friends, preparing and waiting for the coming of Christ,

It one of those things we know to be true, but it's hard to wrap our heads around it: God doesn't keep time like we do. Do you remember when you were a teen and you prayed to God that so-and-so would pay more attention to you? Or maybe you were even so bold that you prayed that so-and-so and you would end up together. But, when the semesters passed and nothing seemed to happen, you might have even had the chutzpah to look up to heaven, impatiently tap your watch and say: "Hey, God, don't you think it's about time you answered my prayer?" Sometimes when the Heavenly Father says "no" to our prayers, we aren't ready to take "no" for an answer. Of course, we know God answers every prayer in Jesus' name – just not always the way we pray them. Many of us have lived long enough to understand the wisdom of this timeless saying: "Thank God for unanswered prayers!"

Perhaps the real reason God SEEMS to be taking His own sweet time is because He's trying to teach us something that we are often so SLOW to learn. God doesn't keep time according to our watches and schedules and that's a good thing. If God had a watch on his wrist, do you know what it would say? I believe it would say the theme of our sermon: **It's Advent and It's about Time.** It's about time to repent and it's about time to lead a Godly life. As we prepare for the Advent or Coming of Christ, let's take the inspired words of St. Peter to heart and follow them closely.

There's no question about it. Judgment Day is coming. Our sermon reading guarantees it. Elsewhere in Scripture, we know that **no one knows about that day or hour – not even the angels in heaven.** Is God being serious here? Let's consider some Old Testament history when God filled our world with judgment. Think about the world-wide flood that covered every square inch of our planet. Do you remember how

God told His servant Noah to build an ark in Genesis, chapter 6? An ark! Can you imagine the conversations Noah had with his neighbors? "Hey Noah, whatcha' doing?" "I'm building an ark." "Really, what for?" "God is sending a flood. Water is going to cover the whole earth." RIGHT. I'm sure there were times when it wasn't easy for Noah to be a faithful witness. Can you imagine the follow-up conversations he had? "Hey Noah – we got a little rain last night – enough to put a few drips on my roof, but not enough to cover the earth." "Hey Noah, where is this flood you've been telling us about?" I wonder how shocked these critics were, when God sent torrential rains for 40 days and 40 nights. No, God didn't stop them from ridiculing Noah at the time, but God did deliver poetic and perfect justice – only thing is, it wasn't according to Noah's time, but all in God's time. God acted as He always does in human history ... decisively. And it must have crossed Noah's mind when he saw the ark rising higher and higher – maybe he even said it out loud: "it's about time."

The same people who walked the earth ridiculing Noah, are the same ones who still ridicule us. They ask: "What good is it coming to St. Paul's to worship each week and giving church offerings?" "What good is it ... "loving your neighbor? Where is this 'coming of Christ anyway'?" "Don't kid yourself", Peter pleads. Don't become like them. Don't let yourself be lulled into a false sense of security because it doesn't seem like God operates according to your watch and time-table. Think about this. In 10,000 years of recorded history, Jesus hasn't failed once on the promises He's made to us – He's not going to start now with the promise of Judgment Day. So what does that mean for us? It means today, it's about time for us to repent.

It might SEEM like God is taking His own sweet time to return on Judgment Day. But, Peter gives us inside information how God works with this words: **8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.** Don't spend too much time trying to solve this riddle. The point Peter is making is that God is eternal – He doesn't have a beginning and He doesn't have an end – He's always been around and He always will be. That's why we need to go to Him for strength when we are weak, for help in any trouble, for forgiveness for every sin. Perhaps you've heard of the man who once had a conversation with God. The man asked: "God, what's a million years like to you?" God answered: "a million years is like a second". The man continued his line of questioning and asked: "How much is a million dollars to you?" God again answered him: "A million dollars is like a penny." The man thought he was being clever so he asked God: "Could you spare a penny?" God said: "Sure, just wait a second." The point is: God is not limited by our 80-90 year human experience. We are limited. Eternity is something hard for us to grasp. And it's sometimes hard for us to wait for His coming. Ask a child how hard it is to wait to open presents at Christmas – it seems like forever. Ask a teen how hard it is to wait to get their driver's license – it seems like forever. Ask a child-less couple how long they have to wait to have a baby – it seems like forever. And ask a lonely senior how long they have to wait to experience heaven – see my point?

So as we wait for Jesus' return, what should we be doing? Peter answers that with these words: **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** What we call "slowness", God calls "patience." God doesn't want any one to go to hell – so He did something about it in our time. Remember the words of Galatians 4: 4-5: **But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son,**

born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. At the perfect moment in our history, God sent His own Son Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins – for every impatient thought, word, or action. Jesus lived perfectly and patiently in our place and died the death we deserve. In His resurrection, He redeemed us or bought us back from sin, death, and hell. Now, today, God gives us every opportunity to repent to Him. Repent doesn't mean just admit you were caught, or that you feel bad about it. It means that you have a change of heart – you clearly see your sin, see how that sin hurt your relationship with God and maybe even others, and turn to Him alone for forgiveness. Give your sins to Jesus and believe His good news: you are forgiven. Think about this: God's love is patient. The longer God delays Judgment Day, is the longer we have to share the message of repentance to our friends, family, and neighbors so that more will go to heaven. I pray each of you have urgency to join us in our Christian mission to serve God and to share His Gospel with others. Yes, Advent means it's about time. It's about time to repent as we look forward to His second coming. Just think of what events will happen on Judgement Day. EVERYTHING will change. Peter again shares inside information with these words: **10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.** So don't get too comfortable in your dorm room, your apartment, your home or timeshare. It's all going to disappear as God gives us a new heaven and a new earth.

But Judgement Day lies in our future, which for God is the present. (Figure that one out!) The question remains: what else should Christians be doing until that day comes? Peter asks the same question: **Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.** Until Judgment Day comes, God wants us to be like the innocent people Jesus has made us. It's about time to lead Godly lives, free from sin. We've repented and given our sin to Jesus. He can have our sin. We don't want it back. We don't want to go back to the same old sin, same old sinful habits. Because of Jesus, sin doesn't own us. God does. That means we are free from the power of sin and Satan. This Advent season, take a closer look at your life, and ask God to help you leave sin behind. Ask Christian friends to help you leave your sin behind. Ask your pastors, teachers, and leaders here at St. Paul's and we will help you too. No – we won't be perfect, but as perfectly forgiven sinners, we agree with St Paul who said: **12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** Paul uses the sports' imagery of pressing forward like a sprinter who stretches toward the finish line .. in this case, the perfect finish line of heaven.

Leading Godly lives, getting rid of sin like taking out the trash, is an important part of our faith. Other people are watching us. Our neighbors, co-workers, and even people on the street see what we do. We Christians may be the only Bible others might read. And they need to see a difference. If they look at us, and our lives are no different from theirs, they figure, "What's the sense of even being a Christian? How important it is to lead holy, or Godly lives.

I don't know what kind of watch God uses to tell time: Rolex, Micky Mouse, or even Apple. But, I do know our time on earth is limited: we never know how long we have. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery. All we have is the present. Let's learn from the past, prepare for the future, and be more active in the present, in the time of Grace God gives us. Yes, Advent means it's about time. It's about time to repent and to lead Godly lives. I'm out of time. So I'll say it. Amen!