

How do you regard your spiritual life? I wouldn't say any of us considers it necessarily a "throwaway" part of our lives. Certainly we see and recognize our need for salvation. We know and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and we're very happy that because of him we're going to heaven when this life is done or when he comes again. But, I think we're all guilty at times of letting it slide off the center stage of our lives (if it was ever there) and letting it be just something we "have" in addition to everything else there is. Hey, it makes sense, we're easily distracted, whatever's not here and now in front of us doesn't tend to get the focus. The God stuff is important but it's not right now, that's way down the road of life, so we'll hold on to it until then when we really need it.

That complacency of living our lives each day as they have always been; acting as though they are never going to change, well that's one of the more serious warnings that the account of the flood gives out. We really do like to think that each day is going to be much like the one before it, and when something major happens to change that, well we sink all our effort into restoring things to the way they were before. We subconsciously just expect that the train's going to keep on rolling in the same direction forever and so we very rarely bother to look down the tracks.

Like I said, this is subconscious. We're all smarter than that. If asked, not one of us would say that we expect our lives to always be the same forever. We know that. And yet we act like it's true so often. But it's not true. And the account of the flood is a shocking example of what can happen when we fall into that trap. <Read text: Genesis 6:9-22; 7:11-23>

Here's the thing: do you see anything fundamentally different with life before the flood and the life we live now? Yeah, there are a lot of little things, but really it's pretty much the same. People go on about their business, handle whatever work or challenges face them each day and then go to bed at the end. As Jesus put it in the gospel reading today, people were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage. They were just living their lives, and they assumed that their lives would always continue just as they had. Maybe some of them knew God was there, they had heard the accounts passed down from the beginning, but they didn't care. They lived their lives of sin and that was that. If there was repenting or returning to God to be done, well that could happen later. If they cared about that at all.

But God takes sin seriously. These people had sinned against him, in thought, word and deed. They had thrown away the Lord as God and elevated themselves to be their own God. They cared about the things of this life more than their Lord, they cared about what happened to themselves more than anyone else. There was anger and violence against each other. And God chose to end the time they each had to repent. This was not unfair of God. The moment we are born we are already sinful. We deserve our punishment right then and there. But God gives us time, simply because he chooses to, not because we deserve it, he gives us time to come to know him, to have our hearts changed and trust in him for salvation. Again, all our time on earth is time we do not deserve given for the single purpose that we might be saved. That is why we often refer to this life as our "time of grace".

In his wisdom and justice, God chose to end the time of grace of all the unrepentant sinners on the earth all at once with the flood. And all of them, every man, woman and child who offended God with their lives and would not look to him for help, they were all of them executed by the waters.

God takes sin seriously. Even when we don't. Even when we've allowed ourselves to be convinced by our culture or upbringing that some sins just aren't a big deal. There are the sins we've never thought of as huge. The white lie or snide comment or even the momentary flash of jealousy or anger in our heart that "didn't hurt anyone". All the times we let "special circumstances" force God out of the forefront of our lives. The sporting event or special friend visit. The days that God gets time from us if there's any left over. These, we tell ourselves, are certainly not on the level with mass murder. And there are the sins that we've been reprogrammed by the world to not think so badly on. The world certainly doesn't care but it's shocking even how many Christians (even Wisconsin Synod Lutherans) who don't see a problem with a couple living together outside of marriage. These sins, every one of them, are damning sins. The knowledge that we have done them should twist in our heart like a knife, because they are each worthy of death.

And that death could come at any moment. As the flood shows us and as Jesus points out, the end could come at any moment. Anybody could be called to judgment before God at any time. You don't have to be aging or in poor health for God to find a way to end your life, and more to the point here, at any moment it could be over for all of us. We live during the advent of Jesus' second coming and when that happens, the time of grace will be over for all of us, just like it was at the time of the flood.

Sin is serious. We all sin, much and daily. Every person will have stand before the judge and answer for their sins. And the just punishment for any one of them is eternal death. But as you and I well know, there is a way to escape this

fate. God has provided us a rescue. He worked all of human history, doing whatever was necessary to get this world to the right time when he could be born as one of us and rescue us. It's that first coming of our Lord Jesus that the Advent season also looks forward to. And in less than four weeks, we will celebrate that great event. The day our God lowered himself to be born as a human so that he could earn us the salvation we would never have on our own.

God loves his creation. He loves each of us no matter how much we have offended him. He takes the salvation of the human race very seriously. Just as seriously as he does our sin. The flood is a stark example of how seriously God takes his work of salvation. Yes, you heard me. The flood shows just how badly God wants us saved. God did not want to end all those lives at that time. It is his desire that all come back to him. But if he allowed the world to continue as it was going, with not a single person holding to God except Noah and his family, then he never would've been able to carry out the plan of salvation as he needed to. The truth of the real God would've died out long before even Abraham came on the scene. It was necessary to wipe that evil from the earth so that the good of his plan could be accomplished.

And this wasn't even an "end justifies the means" scenario. God did no wrong in putting those people to death, they all received exactly what they earned. It is just not the outcome he would have preferred. Those he put to death, none of them would've come around if they had more time. And if he hadn't intervened when he did, no one in all of history could've been saved. God takes our salvation very seriously.

And our salvation, individually, is a very serious thing. Not serious in the way a broken bone is serious or even the way sin is serious, but it's a serious matter. It's something we need to take seriously. Because it is the only thing that overcomes the seriousness of our sin. We cannot make any headway on this problem on our own. We can't fix it ourselves. And there is literally no other way for us to be rescued than to cling to the salvation that God has won for us through his son. It is our only hope, it is all we have to hold to and every force native to this world is trying to loosen our grip on it.

We can't just grab hold of salvation and say "hey well, that's it, I got it." It doesn't work that way. We have to take it seriously or we're going to lose it. And taking our salvation seriously means understanding just how much we stand to lose when it's gone. It sounds cliché but there is nothing more important. No football game or camping trip or hour of sleep is worth losing this over. I'm not saying that doing those things once instantly damns you. But when we allow them to become a pattern in our lives, when we don't take them seriously, then we're playing a very dangerous game.

As baptized and forgiven children of God, our sins are forgiven. Every one of them, past and future. And yet every sin that we commit now in our redeemed state, they damage our relationship with our God. It's like letting termites into a house. You could ignore them, and your house would still be standing tomorrow, and the next day and the next. But if you don't take them seriously and just let them go, eventually everything's going to come crashing down around you. Even with our sins forgiven we need to take sin seriously if we are taking our salvation seriously. We don't want to lose our salvation and ignoring our own sin, failing to take it seriously when it happens, it can eventually destroy our faith and cause us to lose our salvation.

There's another practical upshot to recognizing the seriousness of the sin in our lives; it increases our joy. No, really! The only real, lasting joy in this life is the gospel message. It is the knowledge of a God that loved you so much that he died to rescue you for eternity. And a God that now watches over you and cares for you until that sudden day when you reach his eternal care. But if we don't recognize the seriousness of our sin, if we're not convinced of our own sinfulness, then this prize means less than it ought to. The more seriously we take our sin, the more we appreciate the love of our God in saving us, and the more our own joy grows at having it.

Our Lord will return suddenly. If not for the whole world then simply to take you. There's no guarantee you'll see it coming. Don't wait until that day to understand just how seriously God takes your sin. Recognize it now so that you can understand just how important it is that you cling to the gospel truth for all you are worth. Don't fall into the trap that the people lived in at the time of Noah. Don't get so distracted by this life that you forget what's coming and are caught unprepared. Take your sin seriously, and through that, appreciate the salvation of God all the more. Amen.