

The season of Advent is an interesting one. It is something of an overlapping bridge between the End Times we just finished and the Christmas celebration just around the corner. See we just finished a look at what the Last Day will be like for us as Christians; why we have nothing to fear from the coming judgment, and what we have to look forward to as we enjoy eternity in victory with our Savior Jesus.

But now we take a step back from that and another step way back from that and consider the Advent of our king. On the one hand we contemplate the time just before his first earthly arrival. We'll be doing that primarily in our mid-week services. But we also consider that we live in the time just before his second arrival. We live during the advent of our King, before his return to end this world and bring about what we just looked at in End Times.

And so to consider this; what it is like to live before the literal end of the world and what we might need to know and be aware of or even do to prepare ourselves; let's take a look, prompted by our reading today, of the last time the world ended. Or at the very least, as near to it as the world ever was before. Of course I mean the flood. What happened there, really?

God was displeased with mankind. They had all but abandoned him to chase after their own pursuits of pleasure and enterprise. The inclination of their hearts was only evil all the time. If things continued the way they were going, a knowledge and devotion to the true God would end shortly and the plan of the Savior would be lost. God had to intervene. Of course, simply wiping out the earth wouldn't accomplish anything either, someone had to be rescued to make this plan work. Noah and his family were still devoted to God. And so they were warned and they were given direction to be rescued.

For 120 years Noah worked. And Noah himself was a witness to the coming flood. His preparations could not have gone unnoticed. And it's even less likely that Noah himself kept quiet. Think about that. For 120 years the people had warning of what was coming. They saw Noah building his boat. But the whole reason this was happening was because no one was listening to God's word, so why should they start now?

God was patient, he gave them time. Life went on for them as normal. Each day was much like the one before. Each year like the one before. Why should tomorrow be any different? What reason should they have to think that Noah wasn't just a nutter? They had every chance, but because they wouldn't listen to God, they dismissed the whole thing out of hand.

And then it started to rain. The springs of the deep burst forth and for 40 solid days the water poured forth. So much that it took nearly a year for the water to recede far enough for the world to be habitable again. Everything outside the ark died. And those who disobeyed God so long ago were condemned for their sins.

How much different are things today? How much different will they be when Christ returns? And will we learn from those mistakes, or will we make them all over again?

God warned the people of the day what was about to happen; and nearly no one listened. What about now? From the time of Christ's ascension his return has been promised. Who has been listening? Or maybe more to the point, have you been listening? Be honest with yourself here, because it doesn't actually matter if I believe you or not. Jesus said he will return. God tells us that could be at any time. But do you believe that? Do you trust it? Or do you just sort of intellectually accept it as a "thing that is true," but don't expect that to ever have any bearing on your life? This year goes on much like last year. Today was much like yesterday. Tomorrow won't be any different. Do you live your Christian life as though it were equally possible that it could be over tomorrow as much as it could keep going another day? Or do you live as though you fully expect to have a long full life that definitely won't end until you're well advanced in age and have some kind of warning of injury or illness?

God, like in the days of Noah, does give us time in his patience. He does give us time to listen to him and to be properly prepared. And like Noah, he sends us messengers to warn us and to help us be prepared. Messengers who show us the boat we need to be saved. And maybe we've done a little better than the people Noah had to deal with. We listen to those messengers when they speak; mostly. And we've got our boat, we know how we're saved. But do we treat it like we're actually going to need it anytime soon? Do we keep it close, check on it constantly and do everything we can to make sure it's in the best repair possible? To put it plainly; are we in God's Word whenever we can be, do we come to worship whenever its offered, do we study his word at every chance and do we take the time to encourage our friends and family to do likewise?

Or do we treat it like we don't really need it yet? Maybe it's in a bit of disrepair and we don't keep it handy all the time, we leave it out in the shed for when we might really need it, not even fully convinced we'll need it at all, or again, sure we'll have a little bit of warning to patch it up before it's really essential.

We don't out and out reject God when he warns us about what's coming; but we do something almost as bad. We don't really take him seriously. Earthly life can lull us into a false sense of security. So let's be honest, like those who didn't believe the coming flood, we don't always take Christ's return as seriously as we ought to either. We believe God when he says it'll happen, but we may not think it's possible that it'll happen in our lifetimes.

And if that's the case, are you going to be ready for the new "flood" when it happens? When Christ returns suddenly and without warning and the way of life we know on earth ends, are you going to be ready? What will happen for you?

Peter offers us words on this matter in our reading for today: <read text: 1 Peter 3:18-22>.

Peter makes an interesting analogy here. Not one we would expect and probably not one we would have chosen ourselves. He says the water was what saved Noah and his family, just like it saves you and me. It does make sense if you think about it, of course. The water that came for Noah wiped out the world-wide influence of evil that likely would have destroyed him and his family in the end, and certainly would've wiped out worship of the true God. The water destroyed their enemies. And the water was the same thing that carried their boat above the death.

As we said, those who were left below died. They died and they were judged. Punished to the prison of hell for eternal torment. The very place, this tells us, that Christ went to after he rose from the dead. He was made alive by the Spirit, descended into hell (as we say in our creeds) and there he proclaimed his victory to those in hell. "Preached" to them is a poor word choice, a holdover from a poor word choice in the King James. He went to announce himself the victor over death and the devil. And it is that victory that is our salvation.

And that victory comes to us through water and word. As Peter points to here, the water that saves us is not the washing of dirt like a bath, but it's a renewal, a washing of the old self to reveal the new self of God. The application of water combined with the word of God does for us exactly what God promises. It freely gives forgiveness, it creates saving faith and it prepares us for eternal life by making us right with our God.

It does this all by Christ. Without him the water would be pointless and the words would be empty. But because he died, once for all, you are saved. And it's not about how strong your faith is when the time comes. It's not about how much prep work you've done. It's about Christ. If you're caught in doubt about whether your faith will rescue you, then you're asking the wrong question. It's not about your faith. The question you need to ask yourself is "Did Christ die to pay for my sins?" or even more accurately, "Did Christ rise from the grave?" Because if he rose then everything he said was true and his death has not only paid for your sins, but his resurrection is the promise to you that you will live just as he lives.

Yes, you should take the imminent return of God seriously. Yes, you should be concerned about whether your preparations are in place. And yes, you should live your life in Christ as though this could happen at any moment. But you also don't make yourself more prepared by looking at what you are doing. We are still sinners as well as saints here. Our best efforts and actions are tainted with sin through and through. There is no comfort or confidence to be found in your own works. If you think you are finding any there, you're deceiving yourself.

The comfort, the confidence and the preparation are all found in Christ. Draw closer to him and stay close to him at every opportunity. Don't think of time with God as an obligation. Think of it as a joy to be closer to the one who has saved you. A mid-week service or bible study isn't a burden you don't have to bother with because you "did your church on Sunday". It is another chance to be with the God who died for you. To hear him say "I love you." And to be continually reassured that because of him you are ready for the flood.

Be ready for the new flood that's coming. Not by checking yourself, but by keeping your Savior front and center in your life. Give him the priority like it could be over tomorrow. Sharing him with others like it could be over tomorrow. Live with your eyes on him, live like you really do live during the advent of his coming. Look to him always and you're ready for the flood.

Amen.