

Joel 2:28-32 Matthew 24:36-44

“So this is when the end will come?”

So, is everyone feeling fine just about now? As we saw last week we are able to say that it is the end of the world as we know it and we do feel fine because we know the end of the story and that final chapter is a victory in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The story of the resurrection is how this ends for all of us. When we focus on knowing that at the end of the day Jesus wins, when we understand that we know the end of the story, that should change everything.

I can't shake from my mind the movie Big Fish that I know that I have mentioned more than once here in church. It is a movie about a man who when he is a young teenager and is roaming about with his friends they come upon the house of a supposed witch in town that everyone knows and that everyone is afraid of. She is supposed to have a glass eye and if you look into it you will see how you die. They dare him to go and see the glass eye, and so he does, and when he returns they ask him if he brought the glass eye and he said he did, and right behind him is the witch. All of his friends look into the glass eye and see how they die, it terrified them and they went running off.

The witch asks him if he wants to look into the glass eye, and he does, and he says, huh, so that's how I die. We don't know how it is, but for the rest of the movie, all the way until he becomes an old man, whenever he is facing situations in his life that are difficult, and even dangerous, he knows how the end is and that this isn't what defines him, so he is able to face the present completely differently because he knows his future. We know our future, it is a victory in Jesus, and that should completely change and shape our present, it has to.

Knowing our future in Jesus removes all anxiety and pressure of our present, as Jesus says, why do we worry about the things of this life, but knowing this future has to be paired with a loving relationship with Jesus. Both of our Scriptures this morning define the truth of the end times which we can describe as three things that we can say that we know for certain: Jesus is coming back, say Amen after each one, just humor me. Jesus is coming back. We don't know when. We have to be ready, always, we have to be ready. No days off! But 2,000 years have passed, how are we expected to and how do we maintain a readiness at all times. Let's read and see.

READ

Our first Scripture in Joel is a classic Scripture that is used more often than not around Pentecost because it describes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all of humanity, and who doesn't want to hear that on the day that we celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the bride of Christ, the church. Joel prepares us for the coming of the Messiah, our Jesus, when all of humanity will have a chance to be a part of that second coming. We read that our sons and daughters, all of humanity, even those who are on the lowest rung of our social and economic ladder here in the US and around the world. God will not pick and choose, but rather will pour himself out upon all of us. That's good news and that goes really well with knowing the end of the story and being able to celebrate in that final chapter.

Joel describes that this will take place so that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. It raises the logical question of are we calling upon the name of the Lord in our lives outside of the context of here, the church. How do we call upon the name of the Lord in our every day lives? This promise of Joel has been in place and so when the Son came to dwell among us the first time we saw this Scripture fulfilled, but we also know that it will be fulfilled again.

But a lot has happened in the lifetime of the faithful before Jesus has come back. Just think of the transformation that the church has been through over these 2,000 years. It went from being a home church where those who loved Jesus were put to death by people like Saul and in the Colosseum. To becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine. Then its permutations where it remains one of the most powerful entities on the planet not just through Rome but also here in the United States, if you aren't Christian, it seems, you aren't much. Not the way that Jesus intended things to be. How do we remain attentive and vigilant over these massive changes in the church and culture and society and in our own lives just in our own lifetime?

Our Matthew Scripture, similar to the one in Joel, gives us a description of the end times, all of 24 does that for us. But I want you to read and focus on verses 36, 42, and 44. These verses tell us the same message. Jesus coming back will be at an unexpected time. It is so unexpected, we read in vs.36, that not even the angels or the son know when He is coming back. It mirrors Jesus message to his disciples in Acts 1:6-8 when he is about to leave them in the ascension: it is not for you to know the times or the periods that the father has set.

This unexpected time creates the necessity for constant vigilance and preparedness. We should be asking ourselves the question of what have we done differently today than what we did yesterday because we are one day closer to Jesus coming back than we were yesterday. And for those 2,000 years this has lasted a lifetime for the faithful. It is hard to stay vigilant your entire life and expecting and being excited for the coming of Jesus for what might be your entire life. How do we not become like those in Noah's day who from one day to the next didn't know what was coming until the flood was upon them and they were swept away. We know that the second coming of Jesus will be as unexpected as that flood which caught a careless and unprepared generation off guard.

Well, we are different from them. We are trying to be faithful, we are trying to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior so we are not like those in Noah's day in their complete ignorance of God and His grace. We know that the coming of Jesus will in a similar way come suddenly upon an unsuspecting generation that is carrying on its ordinary activities, like the men and women in Matthew who were just living their daily lives. But one was ready, and the other was not. How can we be the ones who are ready for it?

How does an athlete maintain their readiness as they prepare day in and day out for the battle, for their game, their time to shine and use their gifts and their skills and their training on the field? They practice. How do we remain alert and aware and awake and ready for the coming of Jesus? We practice. I know that I've shared this with you before, but I played basketball in college, all four years, I have a jacket to prove it. I was the quintessential practice player. I could score at will, put me on the best offensive player and I could shut them down. I came in first in all the running drills and all the exhausting endurance drills. I loved practice.

But when I got in the game I felt disembodied. I forgot all the plays, I would dribble the ball off my foot. I once in a game against our greatest rivals, Haverford, got four fouls in a minute and a half. When I went out of the game our fans cheered and the other team's fans booed because they wanted me back in there.

I have told you repeatedly that what we do here on Sunday mornings is practice. We practice here what we ought to do out there in the real world. Here we pray together and we read Scripture together. When we leave this place and go back home we ought to pray and read Scripture on our own. When we are here together we are nice to each other and support and uplift each other. When we get home we shouldn't be unkind to our spouses, or self-centered at

work, or completely disregard those who are strangers or hungry or without clothing. What we do and what we say here in church is practice for what we do in the real world.

I know that some of us are better practice players, we shine here at the church, but when we leave this building it is like we leave it all behind. We not only forget but we all of a sudden see our lives and our families as the most important thing while the presence of Jesus is relegated to the next time that we meet here. Some of us are like me on the court, completely forgetting what we have learned in practice, here in church.

It is hard to stay ready for the coming of Jesus, but when you apply what you practice here in church at home and at school and at work and in your everyday life when you go shopping, well, that allows us to be more ready than we would be otherwise. Let me give you one example that we find in Philippians 2:6-8 as way in which to get ready for the coming of Jesus. Let's read what Jesus did while he walked upon the face of this earth. Jesus emptied himself and became humble to the point of death on a cross.

How can we most effectively be prepared our entire life for the coming of Jesus if not by humbling ourselves to the point of being willing to be servants for each other. The best way to get ready is to empty ourselves, or as John the Baptist says to decrease so that Jesus can increase. You know that when you leave this church this is not the message that you are going to hear. In everything that you do you are going to hear the opposite message and it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that following Jesus is about pursuing what I want so that I can be successful and my kids and my family can get what we want.

That's not what we teach here and this will make all of us woefully unprepared for when Jesus comes back. If Jesus comes back and sees that we have not been willing to practice what we practice, well, that's no good. The fact of the matter is that when Jesus comes back it will catch many by surprise and they will consequently not be ready.

What Jesus is telling us today, what he tells his disciples and his church, is that we are to maintain ourselves in a state of constant readiness. That is, disciples should be acting as disciples are supposed to act. We can do that, because we know the end of the story. Amen.