



Pastor Gwen's Message
 25th Sunday after Pentecost
 "Be Ready"
 Sunday November 14, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Our Gospel lesson today contains some very frightening words from our Lord. There will be wars between nations. Earthquakes will ravage the earth. Famines will devastate communities, all while there will be people trying to deceive us. I don't necessarily think that Jesus was trying to scare His disciples or us, but I do think that he is asking us to be prepared for what is to come.

The purpose of my message today will not be about looking for the signs of the end times. We could certainly do that, as many signs are present and have been present even as early as 50 years after Jesus spoke this warning. But this sort of discussion does not help us. What we need to hear is how to survive during these end days. What should we do? How can we make it? How can we keep from despairing and living in fear? How can we prepare ourselves?

Winter is coming to Wisconsin. It is a bit late this year and no one has been complaining. However, we know in our hearts that it is coming and will be here to stay for several, too many months. Well, on Tuesday, while sitting in my office thinking about our text for today, I took a break and checked out Facebook. Yes, I know that it is easy to get caught up in wasting hours on this site, but it is also the only way I get to see my grandson and what he is up too. Cute picture of my little spiderman appeared as well as a poem that I was reminded was printed 6 years ago and whose author was not noted. It went like this:

*It's winter in Wisconsin,
 And the gentle breezes blow.
 Seventy miles an hour,*

At thirty-five below.

*Oh, how I love Wisconsin,
When the snow's up to your butt.
You take a breath of winter air
And your nose gets frozen shut.*

*Yes, the weather here is wonderful,
So, I guess I'll hang around,
I could never leave Wisconsin,
'Cause I'm frozen to the ground.*

All kidding aside, we know that winter is coming and there is nothing we can do to change it, other than accept it and prepare for it. For several weeks now I have been bugging Rodney to get the yard picked up and ready for winter. The last two or three days he has worked picking up stuff and getting ready. Thanks, dear! You might make it off my "s" list if you keep that up.

I cleaned out the car so that I could get my seat repaired from the leaky battery and while I was at it, I got my winter survival kit ready. I put in a bottle of water, candy bar, boots, extra gloves, a blanket. You know those drills and you probably have routines of your own as winter approaches. Batten down the hatches and rather be safe than sorry.

Our Gospel reading today is also telling us that a blizzard is coming, and we better pack a survival kit, or we will be in big, big trouble. Mark gives us an idea of what we need to be prepared.

First, we will need binoculars. Hugh!!!! We will need them to watch what is going on. Jesus said to watch that no one deceives you. In fact, throughout all of Scripture to "watch" is a familiar command. We need to see what is going on around us, so we don't get too comfortable being led astray. For when we shut our eyes to the sin around us it is easy to be led astray. We must be alert to the fact that some will try to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. So, we must be on the lookout for those who try to deceive us.

There are many examples of even smart, in the know people, that have deceived us:

- Frank Knox, US Secretary of the Navy, on Dec 4, 1941, said, "Whatever happens, the US Navy is not going to be caught napping."
- Economist Irving Fisher on October 16, 1929 said, "Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."
- Thomas Watson, IBM chairman in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

- Decca Records, rejecting a request for a recording contract with a group called the Beatles in 1962 said, “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.”

How wrong all those folks were. Trying to predict the future is sometimes like life without water or Easter without Good Friday. Impossible. So, I think it pays to be alert.

What does it practically mean to be alert? To not sleep through sermons. To watch the news at night and take notes? To read about corruption in the world. We must continue to listen to what God is telling us through His Word made flesh Jesus. We must do as we heard on Reformation Sunday, follow Scripture. Sola Scriptura. We are made free to be drenched in the word of God and see or watch all things through that filter.

The second piece of our survival kit is a passport and a world atlas. We must be available to go across borders or boundaries to share the good news of the Gospel, so we need our passport. The enemy will try to steal our passports so we must stay home with our love of God locked away. After all our goal is not too simple survive but rather to share that love, the same love God showed us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He would not want us to hunker down in some bomb shelter and ride out the end-times storms.

We have a mission and that is to share Jesus with the world. And so, we need a map on how to get there. If not an atlas, at least Google maps and a GPS. I read last week that there are over 7.9 billion people on this planet in 2021 but only about 2.54 billion people have heard and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So only around a third of the people in the world confess Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. So, the other 70 some percent are somewhere in the world in which we live. That leaves us a lot of work left to do.

Thirdly, we need to have a cell phone. How many of you have them? Yup, just about everyone. By the way, it is also something good to have in Wisconsin winters, although the reception here isn’t always good. We need these phones to connect us in times of trouble. We need a phone to be able to listen to the prompting of God’s Spirit instead of listening to the fear and worry within us.

There will be moments in life when it looks like everything is crashing down on you. Maybe you’ve already had one of those moments. We need that cell phone so that God’s Spirit can speak to us through our friends and fellow believers. We call out for help when those bad things happen, and we ask for help. And anyway, who says that God does not have the latest greatest smart phone?

The fourth thing we need in our survival kit is a Bible. We need to stand firm in the Word. Even though we may be looked down on because of our faith in Jesus by some of those 5.4

billion people who don't know Jesus, we need to stand strong. It is not about being popular, being liked or even well-loved by the crowd. Rather it is about being secure in the promises of God's word. And as Martin Luther said when he was asked to recant his idea of following Scripture alone, "Here I stand." We must be firm in the faith and God's word will be there to guide us in His truth. His firm foundation found in Scripture, will surely withstand the test of time.

And so those are the important things we need in our survival kit: binoculars, passport & atlas, cell phone, and the Bible. There are many more things we could add to our kits: love and forgiveness, unity with other believers, resistance to temptation, etc. But Our Lord, Jesus who gave up his life for us on the cross, focuses in on these four because these are vital to all believers: Watching, Proclaiming, Listening and Standing Firm. No one knows what lies ahead. And yes, the thought of the end of the world and what leads up to it is scary. But we know that Jesus will be there, leading us through it. And when the last day arrives, Jesus will return. And those who trust in Him will need not fear, even facing chaos. Even Judgement Day will not take away our joy because we know that all our sins are forgiven and Jesus has promised the faithful everlasting life.

But for the meantime I think Jesus wants us to focus on the present while looking forward to His promises of a new beginning, a new creation. Jesus would not want us to get caught up in the human signs of the end times and worry. After all it is not about the end. It is about the promise of a new beginning. So, while it is Ok to be prepared for hectic times, do not let it diminish the future times of joy as we journey with Jesus to our heavenly home and one day see Jesus face to face. AMEN