

Our reading begins, “As it was in the days of Noah”? Well, what exactly is that saying, “Tell me, how was it in the days of Noah?” What am I supposed to be thinking about after hearing that? The End of days? Check-out time for all of us? Why is Jesus bringing him up? Is it like the church marquee sign I saw once, that read, “Anxious about the END? You Need to ‘No-Ah’- guy!” Not Noah, but Jesus!

So, is Jesus mentioning him, because of just the surprise of it all, the God-planned unexpectedness of an end: **who knows whenever?** Maybe? But I’m not sure the flood so was so much a surprise to his generation- For starters, the flood was 40 days/40 nights of rain, so, couldn’t others have gotten on board the ‘boat idea’ about day 7-8-9? And secondly, Noah’s project had to be out in the open, you can’t hide a 450 foot long, 75 foot wide, and 45 foot high boat (*Genesis 6:15 “300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, &30 cubits high”*). That stirs interest. So I think the point of bringing up Noah, is Jesus’ emphasis on the faithful work and focus of Noah through it all. The point is not so much surprise at the end, but how are we occupying ourselves until the end? Jesus is telling us to keep at work, carrying out our regular activity, responsibly until the end!

Why do I say that? Well, Jesus follows up that Noah reference by adding that people ate and drank-engaged and married. That’s the daily routine, those activities are what keep everything going! Food & Family: like the old commercial advised, “Eat your Wheaties to face your challenges” and about marriage, well, that’s making family, what keeps us looking forward. That’s how we keep going in this cycle of life, keeping at it (daily meal plans & other family maintenance).

I see a connection between this food and family talk first, and then the ‘two -people’ talk – What are those ‘two people’ cases doing, but harvesting grain, and then the next step of milling the grain? All these references detail daily duties, eating/drinking, marriage/family, and working in field/in the kitchen. I think Jesus is informing us, what we should be doing while we wait for end!

So how should be waiting for the end? Outwardly no difference- if we are being faithful. Keep your job. Keep responsibly working away, investing forward – or what do we say, “Save, for a rainy day (*or 40 of them*)?” But the difference is, inwardly, that we keep the spirit alive that “This may be my last- so make it best! Keep at work, but work aware (*what do Easterners say but, “Before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water – After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water” the difference is inside – it’s one’s awareness-mindfulness that makes the difference!*)

I find an unappreciated undercurrent in this reading, but there was an issue in the early church (the immediate years following Jesus’ Ascension, “Where he said, “I’ll be back”), when some Christians took that so literally as maybe, next

week, month or next year. If it's that soon, well that changes things- and some believers disengaged, they dropped out, didn't go to work, didn't plan family (isn't this like the child who asks, "If there's no tomorrow, Do I have to do homework, or need to make up my bed or do those dishes?)

*St Paul even fed this type of disengagement, at first, w/ comments like 1 Cor 7:29-31 "I tell you, brothers, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them.....those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world .....is passing away.") He will later have to correct course on this, I'll point out in a minute.*

So, that's an ever-present hazard when speaking about the end--the risk that people check out early. Facing the end, why work? Why marry? Why keep business? Some even went to extreme of selling off homes and farms, and they just sat and waited! (do you remember the 1997 commune cult 'Heaven's Gate' group that thought their transport out of this world, was to be pulled up in the vortex of Hale-Bop comet's tail into another world. They tragically dropped out of life, selling everything, but the movement didn't end naturally- they took it in own hands suicidally in the comet's wake. But maybe closer to home, on a smaller scale (Richter?) do we remember what happened in our area back in 1990 Dec 3, centered in New Madrid, MO? Climatologist Iben Browning had predicted the big one, an 8-9 level earthquake that day. Schools were cancelled like all week, because of the hype, businesses and offices closed (with the exception of the hotel/food industry that took care of the all the pilgrims & news crews coming to be at ground zero --but I'm sure their hometown economies slumped in their absence!) Some churches stopped programs to hold 'Survival Revivals'! And of course, nothing happened! *(Though some reported minor flooding as everyone poured out their stored bottled water at the same time!)*

So in this reading, I find Jesus' focus on daily duties, food/family, field and kitchen work, a caution not to check out prematurely from our daily responsibility. The end may be near, but I still have my daily duties to accomplish. I'll be judged on how I conduct myself up to the very end – keeping attentive and focused on what needs doing right now. Not shirking responsibility just because the end is near (I'm not saying, but here's a question to consider: On a jobsite, does as much work happen, in the afternoon, as happened in the morning? Or another example of this 'checking out' early - Have you ever tried to get a hold of a contractor on Friday afternoon, or priest on Sunday afternoon?) But Jesus here calls us, even under the shadow of the last day, to keep faithful and fulfill our obligations – do the next right thing always, no matter the end's nearness!

I mentioned earlier that St Paul had to correct himself about his end-days preaching. He does this in a couple places later, when he emphasizes work (we

often misunderstand him here, thinking he is talking about charity, and we argue about the 'deserving poor or not' but Paul's concern was about everyone) so, Paul corrected course on his own rapture enthusiasm more than once, telling his churches that in order to eat, everyone must work. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 he called everyone "to work with your [own] hands...." and in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, he adds, that "we instruct you that if anyone is unwilling to work, neither should that one eat." He is not being harsh (capability is not a question). No, he is addressing the fact that too many people anticipating the end imminently, were neglecting daily work duties. If end isn't near (and who knows), then we have to get back to work! Luke was on to this problem, too, when he adds the words in the Ascension story, of the two angels redirecting the apostles to get back to work, as they were staring idly into the sky after Jesus rose. They say, (Acts 1:11) "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?" (like "Get going-keep at what Jesus told you to do")

So, in the midst of all kinds of idle speculation about the end, (Is it now, today or is it tomorrow?) Jesus tells us, "None of that--Stay focused about your work, and keep in the game. Fulfill your responsibilities and do what we are called to" (there's no end-time excuse to avoid our commitments). In this chapter and the next of Matthew, Jesus shares four end-time parables (*faithful & unfaithful servants, ten virgins & lamps, the talents invested and the sheep & goats-24:45-25:46*). As a commentary about the good, vigilant & ready servants, He will add, "those faithful in small matters, will receive greater things...." (Matt 25:21, 23). He wants that of us – keep at it, regardless of rumors, focus on what is at hand – keep showing up to our duties and responsibilities faithfully. The End or Not!