

**The Second Last Sunday of the Church Year November 15, 18, 19, 2006
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI'**

WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT Matthew 24:29-31 & 36-39

We never expected that to happen. You always assume that those disasters strike someone else – never in your community. How often haven't we heard someone make that remark after a tornado or a wildfire has struck their community? We often assume that we will never have to face some natural disaster. That always happens to other people, but not to us.

The same thing often happens when it comes to some illness or incurable disease. I never thought that I would have cancer. That happens to other people, not to me. Now that does not mean that we do just the opposite and assume that every ache or pain means that I have an incurable disease.

Last year when hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and devastated the city of New Orleans, the citizens of that community never dreamt they would experience what happened to their homes and their lives. They knew a storm was coming and they had been hit by storms before, but never the force of one like Katrina and never a direct strike. Then it happened and the people who had not evacuated were thrown in chaos and in many cases seemingly hopeless situations.

Today our Savior Jesus speaks to us about the end of the world and his coming again to judge all the people of this world. What we have before us in God's Word is our Lord's answer to a question that his disciples asked him after leaving the temple in Jerusalem. This event happened during Holy Week, just days before Jesus was arrested, tried and executed. Jesus had come out of the temple and his disciples were calling his attention to the temple when our Savior said, "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down." (Matthew 24:2) Jesus then walked to the Mt. of Olives and sat down to teach his disciples. They then asked him, "Tell us, when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age." (v. 3b) Jesus then proceeds to explain to his disciples what is going to happen in the world before his return. In the words we will examine today we hear our Lord describe the last day and what it will be like right up to the end. As we ponder our Savior's description, we focus on this thought **WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT**. As we listen to Jesus we are reminded that **I) People Who Predict The Future Draw Attention**. Once we consider what Jesus reveals we can leave God's house and say **II) We Know What To Expect**.

PEOPLE WHO PREDICT THE FUTURE DRAW ATTENTION

Fortune tellers and people who claim to be able to predict the future usually draw crowds of people. Many want to know what they can expect in their future. People will pay big bucks to hear what they can expect in their lives. The psychic hotline was quite the buzz a few years ago. I remember talking to someone who said she had spent \$40 on the phone to have her fortune told. I asked why she had wasted her money in that way and she said to me, "Pastor, a lot of what she said was true." Why do we go to sources that are not reliable and often tell us lies and things they think we want to hear? Why don't we go the source of all truth, to God and find the answers we are seeking? Because there are times when God does not tell us everything we would like to know. However, he does reveal to us what we need to know.

When it comes to the future and the end of the world, what does Jesus tell us? First Jesus describes for us what the last days are going to be like. Remember, we have been living in the last days for almost two thousand years. Ever since the coming of Jesus to save you and me by his work on this earth we have been in the last days. What are the signs that we see around us that remind us that we are getting close to the end of the world? Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. There will be famines and earthquakes in various

places. Christians will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. Many false prophets will appear and deceive many. Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:4-13 passim)

After revealing to us the times in which we would live Jesus now points our attention to the last day. What will that be like. Our Savior tells us, “The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (v. 29) Jesus says the last day will be something that is obvious. The orderly world will come to an end. Jesus will then appear in the sky with all his holy angels with power and great might. Our Savior says that all the nations of the earth will mourn. Why? Because they realize that now is the day of reckoning. Now they will be called to give an account for all that they have done. Now they will meet their great Judge who cannot be bought off or talked out of a just and righteous judgment.

However, there is also good news here. Jesus says that his angels will gather his elect from the four winds from one of the heavens to the other. Who are the elect? The elect are those who God chose from the creation of the world to spend eternity with him in his heavenly kingdom. It is those whom God has brought to trust and rely on Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. It is those who confess that they know and believe that they are basically evil and corrupt. But they also know and trust that the blood of Jesus Christ has covered all their sins and that through Jesus they have pardon and eternal life. Through faith in Jesus you and I are among those whom God elected and chose to spend eternal life with him in glory. So we know that the angels will gather us together so that we will be with the Lord forever.

Now the question – when is this day going to come? Jesus tells us that no one knows when that day is coming. The angels in heaven don’t know and neither did Jesus at that point. However his heavenly Father knows exactly when that time is going to be. However, Jesus does go on to explain for us that this will happen when we least expect it. He compares it to the time of Noah and the flood. For 120 years Noah was building the ark that God had instructed him to build. Many people thought this man was mentally unstable. The people did their daily routines and lived their normal lives. They ate and drank. They got married. They were totally unaware of what was going to happen until the day Noah went into the ark and it began to rain. We know that it rained for 40 days and nights and God drowned the entire human race except 8 people and all of the animal kingdom except for two of every kind of animal. That was God’s judgment on a very corrupt and evil world at that time which had turned away from him to do their own thing. That is exactly how it is going to be at the end of the world. Most people will not know a thing about it and it will catch them totally unaware.

WE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Our loving Savior does not want this day to catch us unprepared or unaware. That is why he tells us what it’s going to be like. That is why he has prepared you and me to face that day with confidence and peace. We are not going to face that day not knowing what will happen to us. We know that the angels of the Lord will gather us to be with him in his heavenly kingdom forever. We can be confident of that. For Jesus tells us, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

The judgment day is not a day we face with great fear and trembling. Why not? We already know the verdict of our Savior and Judge, He will say to us, “Come you are blessed by my Father take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34)

How do we know these things? God has revealed them to us in his Word. God has given us faith through the power of his Holy Spirit working through the Word and Sacraments so that we trust implicitly in his promises. We bank on what he says to us because we know that our God will never lie to us. It is our regular hearing of God’s Word and our frequent reception of our Savior’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper which continues to strengthen our faith and certainty that we will stand declared holy and righteous before our Judge Jesus Christ.

This wonderful news also influences how you and I face our own death. Recently I visited someone who had a terminal disease. We talked about the person's funeral and what they wanted sung and read and the sermon text that they wished to have preached on. The person was very upbeat even though this person was in great pain from the disease. The person knew that they were going to be with the Lord and finally be relieved of all the sorrow, pain and difficulties of this life. There was eager expectation and hope in the person's voice.

Why was that there? The Lord God had worked that in this person's heart through his almighty Word. It impresses upon all of us how important it is to be in the Word, to be reading our Bibles daily. It is important to be hearing God's Word proclaimed weekly here in his house and regularly and often being here at our Savior's altar to receive his body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. For through these means God prepares us for the end of the world and the final judgment. For when we least expect it the day of our death may come. When we least expect it our Savior will return for the final judgment. Through his work and the faith he has given us we are ready to face that day with joy and peace.

Amen.