

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT
December 6 & 7, 2008
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

Keep Watch – Matthew 24:42-51

A city of 2.5 million people paralyzed for 60 hours. Over 170 people killed and 300 plus people injured by a dozen or less terrorists. How could this happen? That's what did happen in Mumbai, India a little over ten days ago. Didn't the authorities know anything about the impending attack? Since all this has happened we have learned that US intelligence had informed the Indian government that they could expect some attack from the sea. The government did beef up some of its security, but they were unprepared for what happened at the end of November. They knew an attack might happen but they did not know when it would take place and as a result they were not ready for what happened and hundreds of people were killed or injured.

In our reading for today the Lord Jesus issues a warning to each of us that we need to be alert and keep watch. Why? Are we going to be attacked by terrorists? No. We are going to have to stand before the Lord our God for judgment. Jesus is returning to end this world and judge the human race. Jesus issues this warning to you and me just as he told his disciples 1,975 years ago. **KEEP WATCH.** We need to stay awake and be watchful because as Jesus said, **I) You Don't Know the Hour.** In his love and concern for our eternal welfare our Savior also warns us about **II) The Dangers of Complacency.**

YOU DON'T KNOW THE HOUR

If someone tells you that they will meet you at a certain time, you try and be there at that time. You're ready to meet them. Now if I tell you I'll meet you but then don't tell you when, it's much more difficult to get ready and be prepared. We leave here today and I say as you walk out the door, "Now be ready because I am going to stop by your house and pick you up." I could show up in 30 minutes from now. I may not show up until Monday evening. I might now stop by for ten years. You don't know. Now that's hard to prepare for isn't it?

Jesus says to us, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Vv. 42-44) Jesus has also told us that he will come like a thief in the night. When people least expect him, there he will be. In fact, our Savior tells us that just as it was at the time of Noah when God destroyed the world by a universal flood, so will it be when he returns to judge the living and the dead. People will be getting married, going about their daily business as if nothing great was about to happen and then, there he will be in the clouds of the sky with all his holy angels accompanying him. The end will come, the world will be destroyed by fire and all people will be judged. Believers will be welcomed into the paradise that God has prepared for them. Unbelievers will be cast into the outer darkness where there is eternal suffering and pain.

If you don't know the hour, how can you be prepared? If you don't know the day how can you have everything ready to welcome Jesus back? That's a good question. How are we prepared for Jesus' return? What makes us ready for Jesus' return, the judgment and eternal life in heaven? The Holy Spirit prepares us for the day. As Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24) How does he do it? He does it through the almighty Word of God and through the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper and God's almighty Word connected with them. Through those means God brings us to trust in Jesus as our Savior, gives us forgiveness for all of our sins and assures us of an eternal home of peace in glory. Through the faith that God has given us in our baptisms through the power of His Word read and proclaimed and by receiving our Savior's body and blood in Holy Communion, we are prepared. We are ready for our Savior's return. We are

ready to face the day of our death with confidence and conviction. For we know the verdict we will hear from our Judge Jesus, "Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34)

So are we ready? Through trusting in Jesus we are ready. Our Savior may not come for another hundred years or he could return tomorrow. As we rely on Jesus for our forgiveness and as a result daily strive to live a life that reflects what we believe and conforms to God's will, we are prepared. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith and it is the Holy Spirit who keeps us in the faith through God's Word and Sacraments. Then it is important that you and I use the Word of God. We read it daily in our homes, we gather here in God's House weekly to hear that Word of Pardon and Love proclaimed to us. Why do you think your three pastors have been going out as a team every Tuesday afternoon or evening and visiting people that we haven't seen here in God's house for years? Because we love them just as Jesus does and died for them. We want them to hear that good news. We want them to be awake and ready for the day when they will stand before their Savior in judgment. We want them to have the peace and confidence that the Lord wants all of us to have. We are not out trying to clean up the membership roster; we are reaching out to souls for whom Jesus died and who God wants to spend eternity in heaven.

THE DANGERS OF COMPLACENCY

When you don't know the day or hour and when you come to learn that it is Jesus who gets you ready to stand for the judgment, it is easy to become complacent. What does that mean? It means that you become self-satisfied and pleased and think, "Well, Jesus died for my sins. I'm forgiven. I know it all. I don't need to come to church. I can live my life however I please. I'm ok." Listen to what Jesus warns, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants of his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth; he will put him in charge of all of his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and the then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Vv. 45-51)

The devil loves to see us sit back and think "all is well with me." "I'm ok." And then neglect our use of God's Word and fall into a sinful lifestyle and defend that way of living because Jesus loves me and I'm forgiven. That's what happened to the man in Jesus' story. He had been put in charge of many other servants to take care of them and was doing that, however because it took the master so long to return, the servant slacked off. No one was watching him. He fell into a sinful lifestyle. He neglected his responsibilities. He mistreated his fellow servants. He associates with others who do not believe in the Lord and follow their sinful lifestyle. What happens? The master returns and is the servant ready? He had been. But he isn't now. In fact, his fate is frightening. He is cut in pieces and thrown in with the hypocrites, those who have rejected Jesus and he is cast out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He is forever separated from the Lord God and his love as he spends eternity in hell.

Every one of us needs to be watchful and alert. It is very easy to become complacent, self-satisfied and pleased with our condition. We start to neglect our reading and hearing of God's Word. We're too busy. There are more important things to do in our lives. Before you know it the Word of God is not an important priority in our lives. We drift away and we meet new people who offer us a seemingly more exciting life. The faith and confidence we once had in Jesus is not important and before you know it we can become lost. We are enslaved in a sinful lifestyle. Jesus may not return to end the world, but our life on this earth ends and we now have to stand before our judge unprepared and hear our Lord say to us, "Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) How sad. That is not what our Lord wants for anyone of us here today. He wants us all to be ready for the day of our death and the day of his return to end

this present world. That's why Jesus says, "Keep watch. Stay awake and alert. You do not know on what day your Lord will come."

This past year I witnessed someone who wandered from the Lord and his word decided to do his own thing and live in an openly sinful lifestyle. Suddenly and unexpectedly God called him to stand before him in judgment. How sad for that person and for his family. The Christian faith that this person once professed was no longer visible and might well have been totally lost. His life at least demonstrated that he was not a Christian any longer. No interest in God's Word and Sacraments and a totally self absorbed wish to satisfy his own sinful desires. I also witnessed a man who had walked away from the Lord for decades and then when he was told that he had terminal cancer returned to the Lord just like the prodigal son. He confessed his sins, trusted Jesus as his Savior and the Lord took him home to paradise. Not everyone has the chance that this elderly gentleman had to prepare for his death. That is why it is important for every one of us to hear God's Word, to read it faithfully. To attend worship services so that our faith is fed and strengthened. We need to come often and regularly to the altar of our Savior to receive his body and blood in Holy Communion. For through these means God keeps us alert, awake and prepared to meet our Savior when he comes. Keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour when you will stand before your Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen