

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Advent 2 -- Dec 7th , 2008

2 Peter 3:8-14

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

In the name of Jesus, who was and who is and who is to come, dear friends:

Whenever I prepare a sermon, one of the first things I do is read the verses of the text in their context. When I preach on a text from Isaiah I don't read all sixty six chapters, but I do read the chapters that come before and after the text. And if the sermon text is taken from one of the epistles, I read most of the letter to get a feel for its content and purpose. 2 Peter isn't very long, only three chapters. And as I read it, I noticed something I hadn't noticed before. In three different places Peter tells his readers something like this (what follows is a paraphrase): "My dear friends, what I am writing to you isn't anything you haven't heard before. I know of your faith. I know you know the truth. The purpose of this letter is to remind you of the truth, to reinforce the truth, and to encourage you to stand firm against those people who oppose the truth". Peter wasn't reluctant to state the obvious, and he wasn't worried about being redundant either. In fact, that was the reason he wrote the letter. And as we prepare for Jesus' coming during the season of Advent, perhaps we can learn from his example.

Already in the season of End Time recently completed, with Sundays called Last Judgment and Saints Triumphant and Christ the King, we turned our attention to our Savior's glorious return. Follow that up with four Sundays in Advent and three midweek Advent services, and the message that Jesus is coming can get a little stale. But it doesn't have to, not if we remember what Jesus' return means for us, not if we anticipate the joy that will be ours on that day, not if we treasure these opportunities God gives us to review the story of Jesus and his love. And so I have chosen a sermon theme this morning in the spirit of Peter. You have heard these words before. You will probably hear them again. The theme isn't very catchy. Some might even call it boring. But it is clear and concise, and it serves to remind Christians what these weeks before Christmas are all about...

Sermon Theme: An Advent Checklist

- 1. Emphasize that Jesus is coming**
- 2. Realize you can help people to prepare**
- 3. Specialize in holy living to give God all glory**

Peter's Advent Checklist helps us see whether we are prepared to meet Jesus when he comes again. It will also help us see whether we are doing all that we can to help others in our world be ready to meet Jesus when he returns. We're going to look at three points on this Advent checklist, and here's point #1:

1. Emphasize that Jesus is coming

Christians who are truly expecting Jesus to come back at any moment won't get bogged down with questions about when Jesus' return will be. They won't get sucked into the spiritual quicksand of those who scoff at the idea that Jesus could come back again any day. There were already people like that in Peter's day, people who said, "**Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.**" In our day such people might say, the world has gone on for 2000 years since Jesus' day, and there's no sign of any Second Coming. What makes you think it's going to happen any time soon?

Of course, they are forgetting one very important thing, of which St. Peter reminds us here: "**With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.**" Time is practically insignificant to the God who created time in the first place. So there can be no sense in saying that Christ is being slow in keeping his promise to return bodily to this earth. Slow according to whose schedule? No, says Peter, anybody who calls the delay of judgment day "slowness" is missing the whole point. "**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. He is being patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**" It's only God's love for the unsaved that holds him back from bringing down the curtain on this present age and ending it all. He's being patient.

But make no mistake, the end of this age will come down, and when it does it will come quickly. "**Like a thief,**" is how Jesus once put it, and Peter repeats that here. Like the burglar no one was ready for, when Jesus comes back there won't be time to reassess and reconsider your options. For at that time, says Peter, "**the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.**" Once the last day has come, the world as we know it will be subjected to purification and purging by fire. That's God's way to remove all evil from our world, and transform it back to its created perfection. At that time it will be too late to decide to get ready to meet Christ. The point is, for Christians the important issue to emphasize is not when Jesus is coming, but simply the knowledge that he is coming again, and soon. So much for point 1 on the checklist.

2. Realize you can help people to prepare

If you're a Christian who believes Jesus' promises to return to our world, you may not be all that concerned with just when Jesus is coming, but you're very aware of the task his Second Coming gives to you. Remember, God is not being slow, he's being patient, because he wants everyone to repent and be saved. Peter puts it very clearly in the verse just following our lesson for today: "**Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.**" The longer God holds back the last day, the more people have a chance to hear the good news of forgiveness in Jesus and be saved from the flames of destruction. But that's only IF one important thing happens. IF you and I are sharing the message of forgiveness we know and believe with others in our world. That's how we are involved.

Let me see if I can illustrate this for you. As Americans, we aren't going to know there is an increased terrorist threat unless our government warns us. In the same way, people around us aren't going to know about the coming judgment that Jesus is bringing on all that is sinful in this world, unless we tell them. People aren't going to realize what a huge problem their sins are, unless we make that clear to them. People aren't going to turn to Jesus Christ as the only hope for forgiveness and rescue unless we point them to Jesus our Savior. The immanent return of Jesus gives each one of us Christians a big job to do, not just as a group, but individually, one on one, with people we know and meet and talk with all the time. We need to make use of those opportunities while there's still time.

Now let's review our Advent checklist so far. Point #1: Don't focus on when Jesus Christ will return, but emphasize that he's coming again, and soon. Only his patience is holding him back. Which leads us to point #2: Realize that you can help people in our world prepare to meet Jesus when he comes. God's patience in wanting all to repent and believe translates directly into a missionary command to every

Christian. You can make a difference in people's lives, if you take God's command seriously and see every day God gives you as another chance to share Jesus Christ. And that really brings us to point #3.

3. Specialize in holy living to give God all glory

Peter frames this last point for us with a question: **“Since everything will be destroyed on the day the Lord comes back, what kind of people ought you to be [in the meantime]?”** That's the question that confronts every Christian, in view of the Second Coming of our Lord: How then shall we live, as we wait for Christ's appearing?

Peter gives us his answer, and here's point #3 on our Advent checklist, **“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”** An Advent Christian is always ready for Jesus' return and shows it by a life of Christian sanctification. We concern ourselves with holy living because it's our opportunity to give God all glory through the way we live our lives. Our lives are to be **“holy”** and **“godly”**, to which St. Peter adds in verse 14, **“make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God.”**

You see, it does make a difference what we do, how we live. The people around us can't see inside our hearts. But they can see how we live our lives. And when people see how you live your life, they get a pretty good idea of what's in your heart. There's a direct connection between what is seen in your life and what is unseen in your heart. If our hearts get caught up in the things, the events, and the ideas of this world, it'll show up in our lives. We'll start forgetting that Jesus is coming back soon and simply live for today, let our focus be directed totally toward this perishing world. And people will be able to see that in our lives. On the other hand, if we are clear on the temporary nature of this life and the permanence of our relationship with God, our lives will be lived for him, and that, too, will show. People will see us making every effort to be **“spotless, blameless, and at peace with God.”** And perhaps they will desire that same sense of peace, enough to ask us where we got it. That's our chance to tell them the simple story of the Gospel, and in the process to give God all glory.

As you get ready for another busy Christmas season, you may be making a list, maybe even checking it twice. As you do, don't forget the spiritual checklist that Peter gives us here in this letter, the checklist that helps you answer the question, **“Am I ready to receive Jesus Christ when he comes again?”** God help us all to be ready for Christ's coming, faithfully awaiting his time, working to spread the Kingdom with our time, and living lives that will bring glory to God for all time. Amen