

“Unexpectedly”

Matthew 24:36-44

“But about that day and hour no one knows,
neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,
but only the Father.

For as the days of Noah were,
so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as in those days before the flood
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
until the day Noah entered the ark,
and they knew nothing until the flood came
and swept them all away;
so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field;
one will be taken and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding meal together;
one will be taken and one will be left.

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know
on what day your Lord is coming.

But understand this:
if the owner of the house had known
in what part of the night the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready,
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Unexpectedly
Matthew 24:36-44

November 27, 2022
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I.

This morning I would like to invite you to abide in a heart-space, in a soul-space, which is at once extraordinary and challenging. It is a place which the Apostle Paul has described as: The Already and The Not Yet.

I begin by bidding you welcome to Advent. Today we begin the ecclesiastical, or church season, leading up to Christmas. As today is the *first* Sunday in Advent, it is also the first Sunday in the ecclesiastical year: so...Happy New Year! The season of Advent is observed as a time of preparation not only for Christmas, but also for the second coming of Christ as Judge at the Last Day. Whereas much of this season will celebrate the birth of the Christ child born long ago in a manger, *The Already*; today, we will also look ahead to the unexpected arrival of the Son of Man, *The Not Yet*.

II.

I would pause, now, a moment to put you on notice, that if you are hearing or reading these words I will speak with you *as*, and consider you to *be*, people who are striving to be disciplined, deliberate and serious about undertaking their spiritual journey. No one can make the journey *for* you. Certainly, others can help, support, nurture and abide you, but at some point *you* must be the one to actually start moving your spiritual feet.

One of the great tools, and struggles, to be found along this road, is *Christology*. Simply, the study of Christ: what and whom Christ is considered to be. Although we ascribe to an orthodox view of who Christ is: the only begotten son of God, our salvation, the judge of the living and the dead; *within* that orthodoxy, there exists a great diversity of distinction and emphasis. This morning, I'd like to give you a very brief, but poignant example, of the Christological range within the four gospels.

III.

If we examine the accounts of the mood and actions at work in the Garden of Gethsemane following the Last Supper and leading up to the betrayal by Judas, we see four *very* different views of Jesus. In the Gospel of **John** we read: “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.*” No problem, right? Bring it on! He’s the Son of God. But in **Mark** we read Jesus began to be “*distressed and agitated,*” telling his disciples, “*I am deeply grieved.*” Proceeding on to **Matthew**, we see a very human Jesus emerge. Jesus threw himself on the ground & prayed, “*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.*” By the time we get to **Luke**, Jesus’ humanity is in full bloom: “*In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.*”

IV.

Today, our sermon text from Matthew provides us with another opportunity to explore and refine our Christological understanding of Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew 24, verse 44 admonishes us to “*be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*” A review of the New Testament finds the title “Son of Man” being used 81 times, the vast majority of which is spread out equally between the four gospels, with one occurrence in Acts, and two in the book of Revelation. Much like our example of the differing Christologies taken from the Garden of Gethsemane, the significance and meaning of the title “Son of Man” (which Jesus uses to describe himself) varies from a preacher and teacher whose person and message is rejected, to the Messiah and Son of God who will suffer, give his life for others, and rise again.

V.

Over the centuries we have adopted an orthodox view which holds in tension both of these perspectives: that the Son of Man is a flesh and blood human being (*The Already*) but, who will also come with glory at some future time (*The Not Yet*). For many long-standing church goers, the notion of the Son of Man coming like a thief in the night, and the admonishment to be prepared is quite familiar indeed. At least in this regard, we are *accustomed* to waiting for, living with, and being satisfied by, *The Not Yet*. We are content to seek salvation and have redemption revealed to us...“*out there somewhere.*” It

is a moment we await and hope is coming, but not yet here. And this is good, and proper, and orthodox, and as it should be.

VI.

This morning, however, I would also challenge you to hear the words of Christ proclaimed to us in Matthew 24 as not only “*the not yet,*” but as “*the already*” as well. *Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.* I ask each of you hearing or reading these words the same question: which hour would be *more* unexpected and sudden to you than *this* hour, *right now*? If we carefully examine verses 36-44, we find that the appearance of the Son of Man will be made manifest in three ways: it will be *unexpected*, *sudden* and, moreover, *unmistakable*.

VII.

Ever the helpful guy, Jesus give us some examples so we will have a sense of what this will look like. As in the days before the flood, we will be eating & drinking and marrying (having babies); there will be no hints or clues, no warnings given. Because the Son of Man is coming at an *unexpected* hour, which no one will know. Then two will be walking in the field, or working at the wheel; *suddenly*, one will be taken and one will be left. And if you rose early one morning to begin your day in your home as you usually do, would you at some point begin to have an *unmistakable* feeling, that your house had been visited by one who came to you like a thief in the night?

VIII.

Our church is quite fortunate to have with us, each Sunday, unexpected, sudden and unmistakable gifts which serve to remind us how we are to embrace the already as well as the not yet; namely, the children of our church; with four babies being born unto us this past year. Many babies come to the world, at an *unexpected* hour. Even when we *can* expect them, their arrival is always far more than we could have *ever* anticipated. There is nothing gradual about the changes a child brings to a home, or to a church; changes that are both *sudden* and significant. Just as each child makes an unmistakable impact on their family, each child also makes an unmistakable impact on our congregation; as every parent and our Nursery care providers, Emily and Kate, can surely tell you. Children are the *embodiment* of the already and not yet. They are already unique and

wonderful, but not yet *quite* as unique and wonderful as they will become in the future.

IX.

Unlike children, who begin their life with a future that is so ever hopeful, too often we adults begin our faith journey with a *fatalism* about the future. A belief that all the things we are seeking and struggling to find, can only be discovered in some far off time to come, or, at the end of our days. We have spent the centuries of our past constructing institutions and well worn traditions which subjugate us to the comfort of waiting for *The Not Yet*. We're not even out of the gate, or up to bat, and yet we've given up on even the possibility of *The Already*.

X.

Does it really take a flood on the scale of Noah' before we begin to recognize that, at least to *some* degree, we *do* know what's going on around here? Can we walk together with our brothers, and work alongside our sisters, and still be fully awake to the possibility that this *too* is a day that God may very well be in our midst? And did we wake this morning with a feeling within us that something is different, that someone has been here, that a change has come upon this place, our home, our church, our lives? Like the gift a new child brings to a couple, our church and to our world. And can we imagine that the door we had left open, has finally welcomed, not a thief, but the guest we've been expecting all along?

XI.

Today begins Advent, a time to expect the unexpected, and to live in The Already, as well as The Not Yet. I end today by offering one final bit of wisdom as a reminder to our congregation, the spirit of which has been handed down to new parents throughout the ages: let us enjoy *every* day with the children of our church: every crumb of coffee cake strewn on the floor in Fellowship Hall, all the toys scattered about the nursery, the mewling and laughter during worship, each crazy answer and idea during the kid's sermon, the wild Sunday morning outfits, and the pitter patter of little feet careening around the sanctuary; every smile and every Sunday. Because, though we can't possibly imagine it now, some day this will all be over, and these kids will be grown and

out of our house of worship. And it will happen, unexpectedly, like the coming of the Son of Man, (*finger snap*) in the blink of an eye. Amen.