Matthew 24:37-44 (EHV)

THE END IS NEAR!

1. The Sign Is Normalcy
2. The Judgment Is Final
3. The Wise Stay Ready

It has been said so often it has become cliché: The end is near. You see it popping up on signs at major sporting events. Those of you who liked the BC cartoons recognize it as one of the staples of Johnny Hart's cartoons. The end is near, refers of course to the end of the world marked by Jesus' return in glory.

Wait a minute. What does this have to do with Advent? Some think Advent is simply to prepare us for Christmas, and it does. But the word Advent means coming. During the season of Advent we look at Jesus' coming – obviously his coming at Christmas. But also his coming into our hearts as well as his coming at the end of time. Today's reading focuses on that – his coming at the end.

Now, The end is near is a message I have heard over 60 some times in my life with the coming of each new Advent season in the church year. Some of you have heard that same message more often, some less. Your parents and grandparents and their parents all heard it before you. The end is near. We have heard it so often we wonder if it can possibly be true. But it is true. Jesus says so and whether we listen to him or not has a direct bearing on our readiness for Jesus to return. Because it's so easy to become desensitized, to be lured into complacency and lulled into spiritual apathy let's listen again to Jesus' teaching that the end is near.

How will we know? That was a question that Jesus' disciples also asked him. In the beginning of Matthew 24, his discs had asked him: What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world? In other words: How will we know that the end is near? Our text is part of Jesus' response: Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns. in fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man returns.

What is the sign that the end is near? Jesus says normalcy. He points us back to another time when another end came, the ending of the lives of most people in the great flood. You remember the details. God announced a worldwide flood as judgment on a world that had grown more and more wicked. 120 years later he sent that flood. For 120 years people heard Noah's preaching. They had a chance to repent, to take God seriously when they saw Noah building the ark and animals marching in two by two. But they did not. Why not? Everything seemed normal to them. They went about their work like normal. They ate and drank like normal. They got married moved out and had kids, like normal.

Look at our times. How would you describe them? Well they look normal, don't they? The economy revs up and slows down. People are born. People die. We go to bed. We get up. We eat meals. We do the tasks of the day. We have normalcy. But didn't Jesus say there would be other signs? Yes. Wars and rumors of wars. Natural catastrophes. Those too are normal. Even the threat of a world wide destruction has become, well, normal. In the lifetime of God's people here today you have seen that threat come in the form of world wars. Then the threat of nuclear winter. Then it was asteroids on target for earth. Then Y2K. Now, climate change. You see, everything is normal. But that is the sign that the end is near. Jesus is coming soon.

Why do we need to take that truth seriously? Because then the judgment will be final. Jesus goes on: At that time two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. This is not Jesus' way of giving us a percentage breakdown of how many people will be saved and how many will
not. Nor, as those who mistakenly believe in an earthly millennial reign of Jesus, does this teach a Rapture where believers are taken off the earth while unbelievers are left behind.

This is Jesus' way of making clear there are really only two types of people. Those who believe in Jesus - who trust in him to take them to heaven - and those who do not. When Jesus comes at the end of the world nobody will get a second chance. The Lord already knows those who believe. They will be taken to heaven to reign with Jesus forever in a glory so great and a happiness so pure we're not even capable of imagining.

What about those who do not believe? What will happen to them? They will be left, not left on earth to keep toiling away - not left behind to get another chance. Left to suffer with the devil in hell where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. What makes this so sad is that it is so unnecessary. Jesus gave his life for all. Hell was not created to be a place for people but a place for the punishment of the evil angels that rebelled against God. All those who follow in the rebellion by rejecting Jesus condemn selves there. At the end, the judgment is final.

So the wise will stay ready for it. Listen to Jesus: So be alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. You also need to be ready for this reason: the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him. He gives a picture. If a homeowner knew on what day and at what time his home would be broken into, he would be ready. He would call the police and have them there. Everything would be in order.

But Jesus is not talking about houses and their owners. He is talking about us. He is urging us to be ready all the time. Why is it that Jesus gave us the sign of normalcy that the end is near? It is so that each day when we look around we can expect today to be the day for him to return. It is so we will not try to play some guessing game thinking the day is far off and we have plenty of time to get ready. Those who think such things will not be ready for that day any more than those who scoffed at the warning of the Flood were ready when it came, nor did they have the time then to get ready.

Those who are wise heed Jesus' warning and stay ready. There is only one way to be ready and that is with a living faith in Jesus as the Savior. The question this Word of God compels each of us to ask is this: Am I ready? Is my house in order? There is a way to tell. Are you feeding your faith in Jesus? Obviously you are here today and that is good, provided you are here for the right reasons. But what about tomorrow? Will you feed your faith tomorrow letting God's Word speak to you in Bible reading or devotion, by print or by e-mail? Is there unrepented sin in your life? A stumbling block to your faith that makes your time with Jesus uncomfortable and guilt laden?

It is not too late. Jesus forgives. Pour out your heart to him. Ask his help in fighting that sin. Turn away and resist sin. Sin did not die for you. Sin did not take your punishment for you. But Jesus did. He loves you that much. The end is near and the wise stay ready by expecting Jesus to return and wanting him to find them ready, living a life of daily faith feeding and daily repentance.

The end is near. God's Word proclaims to us and God always keeps his promises. How long will we have to wait? Isaiah had to wait over 700 years for the virgin to be with child and bear a son as God had promised. For Abraham the wait was 25 years from the time God said he would have a son until the time he did. For Mary the wait was 9 months for God's promise to be fulfilled. How long until the end comes? Only God knows and he does not tell us when. He does tell us: Be ready! Be alert! So let's do that. Amen.