

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But 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. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour

Matthew 24:36-44, 2016

This passage may cause a bit of anxiety for some as they contemplate the end times referred to here.

On the other hand it could be that this waiting and watching that has been going on for 2,000 years has rendered this passage empty of any valuable meaning.

By and large people aren't waiting any longer.

We aren't good at waiting in the first place.

Look at what has happened to Black Friday. It used to be on Friday, but now it has crept ahead through the wee hours of the morning,

then the evening of Thursday, and now on Thursday afternoon Black Friday shopping begins.

Whatever emotional response you have to this passage the call to wait and watch is here.

In the time when the gospels were written the Christian community believed Jesus' return was to come any day,

And they needed to wait just a little longer, watch and be ready.

This passage would have been an encouragement to them.

This would have been a passage that would encourage faith rather than apathy and hope rather than anxiety.

How do we give that life back to this passage?

How do we find power in this passage after all this time of waiting and watching?

That, my friends may be something we have to work at these days.

With an open mind and heart this passage can be a reminder that God is sovereign over all of human history

and make the faith we have as profound as it was when the gospel of Matthew was written.

Jesus tells us in this passage that our God who created history is not what drives us from behind on into the future,

but what calls us as we look forward into the future God has planned for us.

In Shakespeare's play Macbeth, that character's cynical apathy is revealed in this one line:

“Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

But the message of the bible and the church proclaims a counterproposal to this,

claiming that life is a tale told by a strong and sovereign God, enacted according to God's pleasure.

It is full of both judgment and grace,
and it moves toward the time when God will make all things new.

There you find encouragement of faith, and hope for your future.

During this season of Advent we attend to our worship, music and mutual care and education to assure you that you are God's people,

and that the history in which you live and are a part of is God's story.

This season of Advent and our passage today call us away from the anxiety of our history.

While it contains signs of the end times the initial warning steers us away from the temptation to keep apocalyptic calendars on the kitchen wall,

and try to figure out when the end will come.

This has all been tried before and we are still here, the character of the world hasn't changed all that much,

and there is no end in sight.

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

But, you are called to live this life with peace and serenity somehow.

Reinhold Niebuhr is attributed with writing the serenity prayer which calls those who pray that prayer to accept the things they cannot change.

Sometimes it is even more difficult to accept the facts we do not know or cannot prove, but only trust;

yet in the case and context of our passage for today that kind of acceptance can bring a kind of eschatologically sensitive serenity,

a serenity characterized by peace and comfort, faith and trust that all this is in God's hands, in God's control,

that in the end you will be supremely happy with God forever.

After all, if Jesus is hopeful as he waits for a consummation he himself does not fully understand,

surely you can learn from him about waiting, watching and hope.

In our faith and trust we most desire to be able to trust in the future without controlling or even knowing the details of what is yet to come.

Our hope is founded in God

Today's passage helps us to do one other thing that brings hope and restores faith and trust.

It helps us to look forward without apathy or anxiety because it is not afraid to look back.

This passage looks back at the time of Noah

That tale is a cautionary reminder that we ignore the judgment and power of God only at great cost.

It also reminds us that sometimes when we look back at what God has done we can have confidence in what God will do, in God's own good time.

The power of scripture is that it provides us with the stories that are the foreshadowing of what God is doing in our own time and will do in the future.

As community we can look back together at the moments in our past where God was present to discipline and bless, and find there council and hope for the future.

When we gather here we are all about remembering.

In our hymns and songs, our readings and prayers in sermons we recall what God has done for us throughout the ages, and in our own lives.

As we prepare Christ's table for the meal we share, we remember.

As that prayer is prayed today notice the references to the past, to God's history, and to the centrality of our faith and hope as we remember:

On the night in which he was betrayed...again after supper

He took bread and wine—this is my body...this is my blood.

Come Lord Jesus!

As you prepare your own hearts and minds to receive this meal
you can recall your own history with God,

see his handprint on your life in those moments when you
needed him most.

Your faith, your trust is restored and strengthened, your future is
certain

and you can live this life in peace and serenity.