

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

Rev. John F. Koerner

Matthew 24:36-44

“But about the day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father . . .” (Matthew 24:36 N.R.S.V.)

Surprised by God

We human beings are such creatures of habit. We get up, get dressed, eat, go to work, . . . come home, eat, and go to bed. The next day we do it all over again. We are such creatures of habit. I can tell who is here and who is missing on Sunday morning by looking to see which seats are empty. Everybody sits in the same place Sunday after Sunday. Here is the thing, we like our little ruts, it makes our world seem more secure and predictable. It has been said that the only one who likes change is a wet baby. And some of them fight that too.

Maybe the reason we like our ruts is because we know that life is fragile. It can break in an instant. So we seek to protect ourselves by staying in a routine. Still changes come, some good, some bad, some sudden and others only over time.

Would we do things differently if we knew a sudden change was coming? Most of us would. One man had worked hard building up the company that he had started. It seemed that he was on top of the world. Then his doctor gave him the bad news that he had stage four cancer. That very day this man quit his job and went home determined to spend more time with his family. He was fortunate in that God gave him several more years than his doctor had predicated. But when faced with his pending death, he reordered the priorities in his life.

Our text for today reminds us that our lives are not our own. It reminds us that just as Christ came once long ago, Christ will come again at the end of the ages. Of that time no one knows, not the angels, not the Son, but only the Father.

Jesus compares his final coming to the time of Noah. Before God sent the flood, people were doing what they had always done. They were eating and drinking, getting married, having children, working and relaxing - right up until the time the floods.

They were all doing their own thing, and then God comes, God acts. And all those foolish things which they thought were so important were swept away.

The first part of the message then, is about living every day of our lives as if it were our last. For

we do not know, how long we will live. It has been suggested that we would do well to ask ourselves as we go about our daily tasks; “How would I feel if the Lord returned in this minute and Jesus found me doing what I am doing now?”

The first part of the message is that life is fragile and limited. Staying in a rut doesn’t change that fact. It is just a form of denial. Life is fragile.

The older we get the more we understand that. My Father always says that the reason teenagers do such risky things is because at that age we all believe we are immortal. I can remember well the first time someone my own age died. It was a surreal experience.

The second part of the message from our text is a reminder that God can act in our lives anytime. God doesn’t just wait until the end of time to enter our lives. Christ came once long ago as a baby in a manger. Christ will come once again at the end of the ages. But Christ also breaks into our lives in little and not so little ways in the here and now.

In verse 44, Jesus says, “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” There is something scary about this text and not just in the sense that the world could be ending at any moment. It is disconcerting to realize that our lives are not our own. That God not only knows our name, God knows our address, God knows where we live and where we work. And God can show up anytime without invitation and turn our lives upside down.

This is especially true for those of us who have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior. That Lord part means he is our boss. Christ has the right to interrupt us at any moment and tell us to do something else.

That is the scary part, but there is also the good news part. The good news is that God always has our best interest at heart. God can be very demanding and quite unreasonable at times. But we know that God is always good, and his ways are always right.

St. Augustine was one of the greatest saints of the ancient church. However, he was a wild child, a wayward teenager, and rebellious young adult. Then one day he heard the sound of a child singing something about, “pick up and read.” Looking around he found a copy of Paul’s letter to the Romans and opening it up, his eye fell on this passage. “Let’s behave appropriately . . . not in partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behavior. . . Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 13:13-14)

Shortly thereafter he gave his life to Christ and was baptized. God changed him so that he became one of the greatest thinkers and teachers of early Christianity.

In a more modern story, a young woman was the first of her family to get a college education. Her mother wanted her to be a lawyer. Her father urged her toward business. She was leaning toward going to law school when everything changed. She volunteered two days a week at a

tutoring program. One day at the tutoring program a little girl said to her, “You explain things so good, I wish you were my teacher.”

The young woman would later say that it was like a light suddenly turned on. For the first time in her life she was sure what God wanted her to do. She is now an elementary school teacher. (Pulpit Resources, Oct-Nov-Dec. 2016, pg. 28)

Jesus warns us not to become too attached to our present routine. At any moment Christ can come to us and change our course.

A certain young man learned early, from the prejudices of his parents to fear and avoid people of other races. He was not vindictive, as he put it, “I kept to my world, and everything was okay as long as they kept to their world.” He didn’t want to harm them but he also didn’t want those people to come close.

Then one day he heard a sermon that changed everything. The preacher was saying something about Jesus and his love for everyone, and somehow or someday, God used that to jerk this young man up short. He says, “God made me see how I had been compartmentalizing my life. God showed me that it wasn’t good enough to stay in my world and let them stay in theirs. The whole world was God’s world. God didn’t expect me just to not hurt people who weren’t like me; God expected me to love them.” (Pulpit Resources, pg. 29)

Now here is why this is such good news. Left to our own devices, once in a comfortable rut, we would just stay there. Never realizing that we are getting more and more off course.

There is an image from the science world that comes to mind. I have never tried this myself, but I am told that if you were to throw a frog into hot water, he would immediately jump out. But if you were to put the frog in comfortably warm water he would not jump out. If then you were to slowly raise the temperature of the water very slowly to boiling, the frog would not notice and would stay right there in the kettle until he died.

The good news this morning is that God will not allow you to boil in your comfortable ruts and routines. But God keeps breaking in on your life like a lover determined to win your love, or an insistent friend who just won’t let you drift apart.

God loves you just as you are, but God loves you too much to leave you where he found you.

As we go to pray, ask yourself, “Is God breaking into my life this morning? Does God want me to change? If so, how?”

Amen.