

Heavenly Father, You have taught us clearly in Your Word that this world will end, and that Your Son Jesus Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Keep us strong in faith so that we are always prepared to meet Christ when He comes, trusting in His merits and clothed in His righteousness *alone*, for Your mercy and truth's sake. Amen. (*Luther for the Busy Man*, ed. P.D. Pahl, p. 398)

[Jesus said:] "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, 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 when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master 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 hour you do not expect.

In Christ Jesus, who readies His expectant Bride by the eternal Word of power and life for the unexpected time, dear fellow redeemed:

Once in a while you hear of a woman giving birth to a child but she did not even know she was expecting. It is called a cryptic pregnancy. Most often, however, not only does the mother know, but also the father and many others. On account of that knowledge preparations are made – bags are packed, child-care is arranged for older children, employers forewarned, baby showers happen, rooms are prepared. Only the day and hour of the actual birth is cryptic.

Jesus speaks to His expectant Church in our text pointing out that there is nothing cryptic about His return. There will be signs that the day is drawing near as we heard in our Gospel lesson, but the actual day and hour are not known. So let us consider for our preparation how it is that **The Expecting Expect the Unexpected.**

I

At the time of the flood there were at least eight people who were expecting it, namely Noah and his family. Another could have been - Methuselah who seems to have died the year of the flood at the ripe old age of 969 years. The tricky thing even for those expecting is that things went along as normal – "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when

Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away."

But you can understand why the *unexpected* were *unexpected*. Life was going on as normal, except for the huge boat some observed Noah and his family preparing, the large amount of food being gathered and stored, not to mention the animals that were eventually directed by God to embark. This happened over a course of about 100 years. Meanwhile Noah proclaimed the righteousness of God calling his neighbors to repent and to believe in God's great love for them in the expectant Christ.

But the preaching appeared to be of little effect. Although there may have been some along the way who did repent and believe, but died before the rains began. You are among the expecting today awaiting another predicted day of judgment and renewal. As Jesus made reference to it in our text, He said no one, not the angels, not even He Himself knew in His state of humiliation when the exact time of His coming would occur. Only the Father knew at that point.

Why such secrecy? First of all, life is to go on as normal with the human race fulfilling the creation directive to multiply and replenish the earth. In fact these things were said by our Lord after the flood: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.' So marrying, farming, milling – all the activities of ordinary life are to keep happening up until the day Jesus returns. And secondly, we are not to be distracted from these things with speculations about the timing of Jesus' return. Our preparations for it should take place daily as if it were to happen today and yet not let it interfere with our work of serving neighbor for tomorrow.

The Thessalonian Christians in Paul's day got so off track that in his letters he had to rebuke them about idleness, thinking they should stop working as they awaited the day of Jesus' imminent second coming. They were to expect it however, so that it would not take them like a thief during the night.

II

We need to hear the same warnings today as Jesus felt compelled to give in His day and Paul in his. Perhaps we are not tempted so much to neglect our daily vocations thinking Jesus' return is imminent, but more tempted to think His return is so distant that we can easily be distracted by the cares of this life and neglect the means that keep us alert and prepared in repentance and faith.

We are the expectant Church of our Lord Jesus and so by His grace we continue to expect the unexpected, ready at all times without being distracted from our day to day lives here in this sin-filled world. In two weeks we will hear this in the Epistle lesson: “since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”

Our expecting is not to be experienced in fear, but in certain hope. The judgment will not be a frightful encounter for you, rather filled with shouts of deliverance, in which you will hear your Lord declare you to be righteous in Him. His blood has cleansed you from all your sin and His holy life is graciously given to you. So your sin will not be mentioned in the judgment, additionally Jesus’ holy life credited to you will be mentioned much to your happy surprise exhibited in your daily living among your neighbors.

There are Christians who mistakenly come up with the notion of a rapture based on the words in our text: “two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.” Those who think that this “taking” will happen years, perhaps even a millennium before others are taken, are believing a lie. This is not what our Lord is teaching here. These expressions are speaking of those who believe and those who do not and their order of rising before the Lord. Paul describes it this way: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” Then the unbelieving dead will also rise and stand at Jesus’ left hand. Finally the unbelievers who are still living on that day will be taken.

You might remember some years ago the popular series of books called: *“Left Behind”*. They are based on this misunderstanding of Jesus’ words. But this is not just a minor misunderstanding with limited consequences. Believing this false understanding causes sinners to forsake a life of humble repentance and to anticipate with a hellish pride being taken to heaven before others based on God recognizing their superior qualities.

What will happen at Jesus’ return we are to know and expect, but when it will happen must remain totally unexpected. Live now

the lives your Lord has called you to live, doing the things He has called you to do. My fellow expectant repenting believers in the Lord Jesus, you have been prepared with your sins all forgiven, clothed in His holiness. You either will be among the dead who will rise first or among those still living here taken first to meet the Lord in the air.

Daily join David in his penitential Psalm prepared well by our Lord for the unexpected: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance." Plan regularly to hear that shout: *"Your sins are all forgiven you!"*, all the more as that day approaches. Amen.