

HURRY UP AND WAIT

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Jesus told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away."

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Whether you are a former veteran or someone who could be deployed, one thing that all people in the military have had to face is "Hurry up and wait." Units are hurriedly deployed only to spend days and weeks and months just sitting and waiting.

So much of life seems to involve "hurry up and wait." You have a doctor's appointment at 2. You rush to arrange your schedule so that you can be at the doctor's office in plenty of time. Then you wait for an hour until the doctor finally sees you. Or worse you are scheduled for an operation on Tuesday at 8 AM. You do everything to be ready for it because you have to go to Iowa City where they do that kind of surgery. Then you wait all day because the doctor has been called to emergencies. It ends up that you have to spend the night there to get the surgery the next day. As a student you rush to get up in the morning after hitting the alarm twice on your cell phone, throw on some clothes, race across campus to get to class on time, then wait for ten minutes for the professor to show up. Then you are told the class is cancelled. We hurry to reach deadlines for work, only to wait and wait until we hear back from our boss. "Hurry up and wait!"

Our text comes from Luke 21 where Jesus speaks during the week of His death. He warns about the end of the world when He will come again:

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a

trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Just as we see in the whole New Testament, Jesus is very urgent about the coming of the end of the world. There is a sense that it could happen tomorrow. It is no wonder that early Christians believed that the world could end during their lifetime. It sounds as though Jesus is telling us to hurry because the end is near.

But almost 2,000 years have passed since Jesus spoke those words, and the end is still not ended. We've heard stories of people who sell all they have, go off to the hills, and wait for Christ to return. To us they are out of touch with reality. We can't just sit around all day waiting for Jesus to come. So why should we hurry up and get ready for the end when we will probably only be stuck waiting all our lives for something that won't happen?

If there is anything we value in our culture, it is time. It can be as precious to us as gold. My mom asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I thought for a moment and then answered, "Time." International students tell us how much Americans covet time. People in their countries yearn to live in separate houses like we do. But we seem to want time. College students need time to cram for tests and finish papers and projects. School children wish they had more time after a day out of school. Mothers need time to clean up after Thanksgiving and get ready for Christmas. Workers need time to get things done around their houses when they get home from work. Churches need people who give of their time to help. Because time is so valuable, we hate to waste it. That's why we mutter underneath our breath about long traffic signals, lines at the check-out counter, full parking lots, and being put on hold on the telephone.

That's what makes it hard for us to wait for God. Doesn't it make more sense to enjoy life and put off God until the last minute when we really need Him? When I'm dying in the hospital bed, then it won't seem like a waste of time to think about God.

Statistics show that very few people convert to Christianity on their deathbed. The overwhelming number of people who come back to church or come to faith as adults do so between the ages of 25-35 when their children start coming to Sunday School. In fact most people become Christian before the age 22. By the time people reach retirement, very few of them will come to faith. Even in the face of death, they don't do a sudden about face.

Jesus is concerned about the end. He presents to us in Luke the real urgency about the last day. But isn't He just using scare tactics? Isn't He just saying, "Turn or burn"? No, He is giving us the gift of time. When we focus our time on things of this world, things that don't last, He is giving us time back, time to focus on the eternal life He brought into this world. No, the world may not end tomorrow. But the point is that it will. That's why we can look to what Jesus offers us—life with Him that never ends,

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come." Luther explains about this that God's Kingdom comes without our prayers, but we pray that it come also among us. Jesus' urgency is about the coming of His Kingdom. That Kingdom will come when He comes again in glory as King of the universe. But that Kingdom is also now. That's why there is time for Christ to enter into our lives and the lives of others. But is that time worth waiting for?

God sure felt it was worth it. He waited for centuries so that you and I could be a part of God's Kingdom. When we're watching a movie where the bad guy is picking on innocent victims, we can't wait until He gets his due. How much greater must be God's desire to destroy evil. Yet, He waits, waits for people like you and me to know Jesus. He waited for centuries until He sent Jesus on Christmas. He waited as Jesus was pinned to the cross for us. And He waited until each one of us could be His through baptism. God waits because He feels we are worth the wait.

Now we can wait. But it is not waiting in the normal sense. Instead of "Hurry up and wait" our lives are now, "Slow down and get busy." Knowing that the world will end helps us to put the brakes on so much that keeps us busy. Instead of directing our lives on investments, bigger houses, extra cars, and fancier toys—all things that will end—we can direct our lives towards the relationship we have with Jesus and therefore with each other—what can last forever.

Waiting for Jesus doesn't make us ignore the problems of this world. If we weren't sure we would be with Him, then we'd spend all our time trying to be good to be ready for the end. And if He didn't come again, who cares what we do now? But instead we have both a reason to do good now and the hope that it is worthwhile, because we do it not to reach the impossible of eternal life, but because we already have it. God blessed us so that we slow down and get busy in living the new life Jesus has given us.