

**Pastor Madelynne Lindsey**  
**December 1, 2019**

Wake Up Everybody Matthew 24:36-44

Let us pray: Advent God, come with justice and with mercy, bringing faith and hope and love, come, Lord come. Come, like a thief in the night, find us ready in the darkness, mindful of the cost, but watchful for the dawn of salvation in our midst. Amen.

Good morning everyone and I hope all of you had a wonderful Thanksgiving. The title of my sermon, 'Wake Up Everybody' is not a request or a demand. We're going to be focusing on those words from Christ on this first Sunday of Advent.

Advent is this time of four weeks devoted to the Advent of Christ. Advent meaning Christ's arrival, Christ's presence with us. On Christmas we celebrate the first Advent when Christ was born on earth.

The second Advent focuses on the time when Christ will come again, return from heaven to earth in glory. With that, this season of Advent challenges us to envision God's future as a guide in how we live in the present. Our focus today is on how Christ's words about the future shapes how we live today.

Jesus cautions the disciple community about useless speculation about the timing of "that day" when the Son of Man will come. "No one knows" the timing of that event except the Father. The point is underscored using two illustrations. The day will come as a total surprise, just as the flood was for Noah and his family.

The second illustration with its reference to one person "taken" in the field or one woman "taken" while grinding meal (the word is often translated as "rapture") has been the occasion for much speculative literature and Christian imagination about the end times.

But we need not to miss their simple point: the surprising timing of the coming, which "no one knows," and Jesus' call for wakeful readiness for a coming that will be as surprising as the coming of a thief in the night.

William Willimon, Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, tells the story of a funeral he attended early in his ministry while serving a small congregation in rural Georgia. A relative of a member died, and Willimon and his wife went to the funeral as guests of the member.

It was at an old country Baptist church. Willimon says, "I had never seen anything like it. The preacher began to preach. He shouted; he flailed his arms and yelled, 'It's too late for Joe. He's dead. But it ain't too

late for you. People drop dead every day. Why wait? Now is the day for decision. Give your life to Jesus."

There was no comfort for the family or honor given to the life of the person who'd died. Willimon thought it was one of the worst things he'd ever seen. He fumed and fussed at his wife Patsy, complaining that the preacher had done the worst thing possible for a grieving family - manipulating them with guilt and shame, almost blaming them for their relative's faults. Patsy agreed with him... But then she said: "Of course the worst part of it all is that everything he said is true."

We must face the truth that all things come to an end. It is how we deal with the end days. So, we face it with fear? There are times when fear can be an appropriate and positive response to situations in life. The Bible talks about some fear as negative - like in 1 John 4:18 where we're told, "If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love."

Fear of punishment is a negative fear - it's reacting to God as if God were a threat to you. But John also recorded fear of God in a positive sense Revelation 15:4 says, "Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Fear, like many things, can be positive or negative. Fear that causes us to love and worship God; fear that causes us to take action to love others - like fearing that people will die in our community without knowing God's love - is a good and positive thing. Too often we preachers avoid fear and go out of our way to make our words comfortable, so we don't scare people.

But today I want to generate a little positive fear in you. I want to talk about when things end and about the end of the world. In the early church, believers were persecuted, tortured and put to death for their beliefs.

There was a lot of negative fear possible, but they stuck heroically to their faith because their positive fear - their fear of betraying God and their fear for the lives and souls of others who needed to hear the Good News of Christ. The world was against them and to them it seemed that, surely, the end of the world was near.

In the middle centuries, disease - a horrific plague - swept across most of the world and, in some places, destroyed three quarters of the population. Can you imagine living in a place where only one out of four survived? Whole civilizations were paralyzed or incapacitated; nations fell;

Europe descended into a dark age ripe with superstition and barbarism. And to many it seemed that, surely, the end of the world was near. During the Second World War, it seemed like wildly nationalistic Nazi

Germany would sweep across the world, installing an insane religion of hatred and fear.

To many people it seemed that, surely, the end of the world was near. In the second half of the 20th Century, we faced a world full of horrifying weapons and political tensions. Fingers were poised over buttons that would unleash mass destruction.

And many people said that, surely, the end of the world was near. And in this still young century, terrorism means that death can strike at any moment, practically any place. We can be randomly involved in a war that we're not even much aware of and the tensions and scope of the attacks seem to be growing. You know as well as I that there are lots of people who are saying that, surely, the end of the world is near.

Now, there are some who would laugh to hear me say that and not take it seriously, which doesn't surprise me because, remember, Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." They didn't expect the flood. I don't expect the world to expect the end of the world or change because of it. Noah's neighbors were busy with their day to day concerns.

They were eating and drinking and marrying - all normal, completely acceptable pursuits. But because they were caught up in those day to day concerns, they didn't expect God to show up. "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. You... must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Have you done all that you can do here in this world? What new start could you make? What circumstance could you still turn around? What word of hope, of grace, of love, what caring action could you take while it's not too late? What right thing could you still do?

I praise God that we don't know when the end of the world or the end of our own lives will come. It's so easy to put off all the things we need to get done.

Every Christmas Eve Wal-Mart is full of people. We've known all year it was coming but we got too busy. We can't afford to be too busy for God; too busy for love; too busy for caring; too busy for sharing the Good News. Not knowing how long we have left means that it's always urgent.

Our lives as believers are lived like we're living on a sinking ship. If you've had a quarrel with your spouse, your parent, your child, your friend, your brother or sister, it doesn't seem as important if you're both on a boat that's going under! Who do you need to tell that you love them?

Who do you need to forgive? What needs to be put in order? If you're on a sinking ship, you need to warn the others on the ship with

you. There's a story about a sinking boat. The captain yells to a passenger - a church member - to go to people and tell them the boat is sinking, the end is near, and they need to get to safety.

The church member respectfully declines, saying, "I don't have time to warn anybody, I have to get off the boat... BUT THE SHIP IS SINKING! And you better ready to get off. And "...about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

You... must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." We need to understand the time we live in. Paul said in Romans 13:11-12a, "...do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here." It's time for you and me and for our church and all churches to wake up and see there's a lot to be done. Many people in declining churches are waiting for the someone to come who will turn things around. We're waiting for people to provide meaningful worship and meaningful programs and meaningful ministries.

We're waiting for the time when people will come and step up and make it all work. Well, the time has come... and we are the people we've been waiting for! It's not going to be the next program or the next new member or some staff person or some pastor who will turn things around - that's not how it works.

It's God's people being the people God means them to be. All a leader can do is try to inspire people and channel efforts. It's you, whatever age you are or ability you have, who's the right person for the job - because it's not you, but Christ working in you that matters. It's your willingness to let Christ work in and through you that matters. Wake up everybody. Amen.

Let us pray...God, you know our lives and the decisions we need to make each day. Those decisions can be easy or hard, they can be quick or require some time to make. With all the happenings of our lives, help us to follow Christ's request to keep awake as we seek to remain faithful and be blessed, and bless others, by your love. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.