

Restored Hope | Romans 13: 11-14; Mathew 24: 36-44 | LUMC | 11-27-2022

Dear Church family and friends: Last week's sermon introduced Advent. We are now entering the season of Advent. The Advent season is the time for preparation, and repentance, looking forward to Christmas, a season of joy and great rejoicing. We rejoice at the birth of Christ, our Savior, and the Savior of the world. The Advent season consists of four weeks, and each week explores a different theme.

The first theme is preparing for restoration. We have gone through the Christian year and as we enter a new year, we seek God to restore us into good health and a purposeful spiritual journey. We reflect and repair—repent any of our shortcomings. We seek God's forgiveness and seek others to forgive us and restore our hope!

Forgiveness for me is a complex term and needs my utmost attention. It is letting go of sins I may have committed to myself and to others. Forgiveness becomes a reality when one recognizes personal evils done and feels vulnerable. Forgiveness is an action we initiate toward ourselves or those we wronged.

Forgiveness does not come easily. Often evils get swept under the carpet by those who do not want to bring themselves into the reality of their sins. We are now in the season of self-forgiving and seeking forgiveness in obedience to God. Therefore, today we are reminded that forgiveness is our response and acknowledgement of what Jesus did for us on the cross to restore our relationship with God.

This season also reminds us that Christ is ushering in his reign in our lives. We want to start by listening to Isaiah's message of hope and anticipation for the coming reign. Whereas Isaiah emphasizes restorative hope, the Gospel reading reminds the recipient of the coming reign of Christ. Jesus also instructs us to set goals for waiting in anticipation of Christ's birth and incoming reign.¹

Over the years some Christians have predicted the final day of Christ's reign. Some of the early church Christians taught that because Jesus raised two fingers as he rose to heaven, his coming would be an even number. They predicted two days and he did not return. They moved their prediction to two weeks, two months, two years, and finally 2000 years. I preached at a Christmas Eve service in the year 2000, and more people turned out for that service than ever before, overflowing the building. It was a multitude I had never held forth before. When I inquired, some of them said they did not want to be left out that evening because Jesus was coming. At midnight there was wild excitement. Nevertheless, Jesus never turned up. The prediction is now moved to two million years.

Where is your hope?

I want to remain with the scriptural teaching about the coming of the Lord according to the Gospel of St Mathew. Jesus tells us that no one knows the hour or the day, not even himself, but "only the Father knows". Would you join me to be hopeful and trust God to do what God does? God abides by God's calendar, and God can restore our hopeless spirit arising from human created traditions. And God can renew our faith.

¹ Isaiah 2:1-5; PS 122

In the same reading, Jesus reminds us not to be like people of Noah's generation. They ignored God's prophesy of rain, they continued to enjoy life according to their standards, they "ate and drank lavishly, they married and gave themselves to marriage to the very last day when Noah got into the Ark"! Amazingly, within 40 days floods swept all human beings off the face of the land except those in the Ark. Debates abound as to whether Noah's story is a reality or a myth. I have read commentaries and books, and have attended some debates. Nevertheless, I do not doubt the Old Testament or St Mathew because all Jesus' statements in the Gospels are in quotation marks (" ") to minimize any doubts. During this season of lavish eating and drinking, let us be reminded that we are people of the cross and whatever we do we do it to the glory of God.

During this season some denominations encourage fasting and helping the poor. At LUMC we provide Christ basket and encourage individuals to offer according to their abilities toward the less fortunate. Fasting is biblical and is done for certain reasons like spiritual restoration. In this season I will fast and pray over several issues in the Church of Christ, that is, the Universal Church and other needs. I will fast!

Christ is also reminding us that his reign is nigh, and that judgement will start with the believers and then to the nonbelievers. St Mathew also informs us that, at that time, wheat and weeds will be separated, and two people in the same career, in the same family or in business together, will be separated—one may belong to the reign and the other will be left. When that day comes, my prayer is for all of us here, who have repented and feel forgiven, may enter eternity!

St Mathew continues to inform us that to be a candidate for eternity we must harken to Jesus' lasting advice: He commends us to "Keep awake and be ready for we do not know on what day or hour our Lord is coming". Jesus applies human security intuitions by using the example of a thief breaking into our property. Jesus says all of us would be ready if we knew when the thief would break into our house.

Why did Jesus' use this house analogy?

I am sure it is because it's where we sleep and store our precious belongings. We secure our homes with locks, alarms, cameras, wire fencing, even electric fences, and human security guards sometimes. We do all we can to secure our belongs from a burglar.

The thief illustration is aimed to appeal to us and alert us to place our faith above our property, and trust Christ more than our concern for our belongings! Jesus is categorically saying that our faith is not secondary to our material wealth, or to relationships in business, or to family settings. Jesus cites these daily analogies to reach us with a message of reviewing and restoring our spiritual life.

My grandma told me a story of a thief who broke into a neighbor's house. The rich neighbor suspected that thieves could break into his house to steal his money and property. One night a crook began to break into his house. The owner, a light sleeper, got ready for the attack. The thief came into the table room through a tunnel he had dug. The owner of the house subdued him to the ground before he regained the

strength, he expended from digging the tunnel. The owner of the house asked him why he was in his house. The burglar responded “I am going to the sky to eat clouds. The road that passed here, is it closed?” The owner did not respond to such an unreasonable question. Instead, he called neighbors to help apprehend the villain and “frog-march” him to the nearby police station. This neighbor was constantly on guard; he did not allow his property to be stolen.

This is exactly what Jesus is wondering of us. If evil thoughts strike your memory, or a friend tries to misguide you, or a relative doubts your faith, or a coworker is constantly questioning your faith, or a neighbor causes you to stumble, are you ready with a remedy? Jesus wants us to be ready to defend our faith. Can you defend your faith against the enemy using spiritual resources of faith?

St Paul lines up daily evils we must awake to: some are evils done (behind your back) in darkness that include backbiting others, malicious plans, binge drinking that may lead to addiction. And quarreling—how many of us can avoid quarreling?

Oh God! Save us! St Paul also mentions jealousy and many more wrongs. When you have time, please read more vices mentioned in Ephesians chapter 5 and 6. St Paul encourages us to awaken to these bad acts that Jesus refers to as darkness, because of the deeply negative effects they cause others. Jesus and Paul want us to awaken and live in the daylight because the night is gone, salvation of the soul is a reality! We can live by the tenet of scriptural teachings, which is not a myth but a living reality.

Finally, St Paul encourages us to use all the armor of God to minimize or even erase living in the flesh. The desires of flesh can be controlled by the presence of Christ in our lives. Christ fully restores believers’ hope inside out. May God’s grace that was given to us free on the cross be an ever-constant reminder this season that we are not alone. Christ lives in us shaping us into Godliness. Let us zealously keep our vigil for the coming of Christ.

Amen.