

Advent 1; Luke 21:25-36
December 2 & 3, 2018

I have not experienced the destructive force of a hurricane first hand. The closest thing to a hurricane was a tropical storm years ago in Florida. But I have seen first-hand how destructive a hurricane can be. In August of 1992, Hurricane Andrew slammed into southern Florida and across the state. The storm was estimated to be a category 5 hurricane with sustained wind speeds at least at 165 miles per hour. It was the strongest in decades and the costliest hurricane to make landfall anywhere in the United States until it was surpassed by Katrina in 2005. It passed directly over the city of Homestead in Dade County. Andrew stripped many homes of all but their concrete foundations. In total, Andrew destroyed more than 63,500 houses, damaged more than 124,000 others, caused \$27.3 billion in damage and left 65 people dead. Several days after it Florida, I and another Pastor took a truckload of supplies to one of our congregations that was the hardest hit in the area. It's hard to even describe what we see. I cannot imagine riding out the storm.

Hurricane Andrew, however, was not the first time that I had seen the damage that a hurricane can do. On September 22, 1989, Hurricane Hugo slammed into the coast of South Carolina just slightly north of Charleston. Hugo was a category 4 hurricane. It was a little less than Andrew with only sustained winds of 140 mph. The area around one of our WELS congregations in Summerville, just outside of Charleston, was hit hard. We loaded up the car with as many supplies that could fit into the car and drove them up to Summerville. Again, it is hard to describe the amount of damage that was done by Hugo. With seeing the damage firsthand that a hurricane can do, it is hard to imagine why anyone would try to ride out a powerful hurricane.

Hurricanes are different than the tornados or straight line winds that we may experience here in the Midwest. They are different in this way – almost always there will be warnings going out to people that say that there is a hurricane coming. As it gets closer and closer to making landfall, those warnings get more intensive and specific to the people who are living in its path. They know it is coming. There is nothing that anyone can do to stop it. People cannot say that they didn't know it was coming. They had all the information that they needed to get ready for it. The question then becomes: *What will you do with the information?* Are you going to get out of its way? Or are you simply going to ignore the information and decide to stay?

In some ways, Judgment Day is like that. When that day comes, people cannot say that they had not been warned. The Bible is filled with warning after warning about that last day. In 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament, we find sections dedicated to talking about the Last Day. In all the topics that Jesus chose to speak about in the last week of his life before his crucifixion, it was the Last Day.

You simply cannot read the Bible and say that you have not heard about Judgment Day. The words that Jesus speaks in our text are spoken by Jesus in that last week before his crucifixion. He says: **“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.”** This is not the only place that Jesus talks about the signs of his return. The reason that Jesus spoke these signs was not that they were supposed to be a checklist. He isn't saying that when all the boxes get checked off, he is coming. Those signs were present at the time that Jesus spoke them. There have always been some kind of natural disaster. Studies tell us America has been involved in some sort of war or conflict in 93% of the years of its existence. There has never been a year without some kind of natural disaster. Worldwide there has never been a time that nation didn't rise up against nation.

So, if the signs have been around all the time, then why does Jesus give us so many warnings in the pages of Scripture? The simple answer – he loves us. God is clear in His Word. Hell is a terrible place. It is a place that one will be in everlasting torment and pain. God is serious about sin. He cannot overlook it. Sin can only bring death.

Yet, people will just simply dismiss the warnings. The people of Florida and South Carolina knew that the hurricane was coming. There were people who simply ignored the warnings. There were people who thought that they knew better. Perhaps, they thought that the destructive force of the hurricane would not strike them. Dozens of people died in those storms simply because they chose not to believe the warnings. They chose to ignore the information.

Jesus doesn't want us to dismiss the warnings. He does that because he loves us. Jesus doesn't just warn us; He wants us to know just how much he loves us. He wants us to be able to stand in his presence on that last day and know that we don't have to worry where we will spend eternity. He wants to know that heaven is this incredible place that we cannot even fully imagine. No more aches and pains, no more sickness, no more sadness, no more frustrations, no more disasters, etc. Heaven is this perfect place ruled by a perfect God over perfect people.

Jesus wants you to be there. He wants you to know that the only way that we can get to heaven is not through anything we can do. It is because of what he has done for you. That's why Jesus says: **"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."** When that Last Day comes, we have NO reason to fear. Our Lord is coming back to get us. He loves us. He came to this world as a little baby. He lived in this sinful world. He suffered our punishment. He died for our sins. And then he rose to assure us that his victory is our victory. He wants us to go through the door to heaven. He has provided the boarding pass.

Have you ever sat at an airport and heard the gate agent announce the name of someone who has gotten on the flight. As it gets closer and closer to the departure of that flight, the warning goes out that it is the final boarding call for passenger _____. Finally, the door is closed. The plane is pushed back. About 15 minutes later, a person walks up to the gate agent and says that they didn't hear their name called. They may even see that plane sitting on the tarmac not far out from the gate. It's too late. They had their chance. They had the warning. They are not going to pull the plane back and open the door. Jesus wants you in heaven. He will do it all. He is the ticket. He's the gate agent. He's the plane. He is everything.

Until that day comes, he wants us to **"be always on the watch."** He wants to fill us with the fuel of his Word. It would be foolish to ignore the calls of our gate agent. It would be foolish to not listen to the warnings of a hurricane coming. It would be foolish to think that we should not be listening to the warnings of our Savior and let him fill us up with his promises. We have a God who loves us dearly.

Today, we begin the season of Advent – a new church year. We prepare to meet our Savior in Bethlehem. So, it seems a little strange that we begin the season of Advent talking about Judgment Day. We have been doing that for the last 3 weeks. Yet, it's the perfect place to start because we are reminded that the second coming of Jesus is something we can look forward to because of his first coming in Bethlehem. Yet, life between those two comings is not easy. There will still be suffering and pain. Yet, we can also live a joyful life because we have more than just HOPE or OPTIMISM. We have CERTAINTY in Jesus. That's hope we can count on. Amen.