

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 25 – November 17, 2024
Luke 17:20-30 – The Days of Noah
Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.”

Eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building. Life goes on, day after day, year after year. From the day sin entered the world until now, there is nothing new under the sun. Everyone lives and dies and ignores God, and nothing changes.

Nothing changes, until it does. Until the rain starts to fall, and the floodwaters come and sweep them all away. And don't imagine that the people in Noah's day had no warning. Noah warned them. They could have built as many arks as they wanted, but they did not believe.

And it was just the same in the days of Lot. They were warned. Lot told his sons in law, “Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.” But they laughed in his face.

And so in the morning, sulfur and fire rained down from the Lord out of heaven. And God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and all their inhabitants, and the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

God destroyed the men of Sodom that day for their perversion and lust, for carrying on however they pleased all the time. Those evil men thought no one and nothing would ever stop them. They thought they would get away free, until the brimstone fell and burned them all to dust.

Today, things are no different. As in the days of Noah and Lot, the men of our world seek pleasure all day long, and no one lifts a finger to stop them. If they're not wasting their time with endless late night video games, or gambling away their money in sports betting and high-stakes stocks, then they're doing much worse. They're engrossed in pornography, or swiping left and right on Tinder, looking for the perfect hookup. Or they're drinking and joking with their buddies after work, bragging about their sexual exploits and mocking the women they know. Or they get bored with normal casual sex and start looking for new fun with one another, like the men of Sodom. And no one lifts a finger to stop them, until the day of judgment comes.

And are the women any better? All day long they're binge-watching shows and gossiping with their girlfriends and shopping online. They dress up promiscuously, and then blame the men when they notice. All day long they loudly denounce the patriarchy, but at night they play the dating game and hook up because the attention is intoxicating. But sooner or later, these women grow so jaded with men that they seek comfort in one another. Emotional comfort at first, but before long they too are making love together. And no one lifts a finger to stop them, until the day of judgment comes.

As for those who seem more mature in society, who've moved past the worldly pleasures of youth, they have not moved past sin. Marriages fall apart, older men wish they could find someone young and hot again. Older women criticize their husbands until they drive them away. Divorce is as nearly common as marriage, and let no one dare speak a word against it! Let no one ever dare call it sin, or tell a divorcee that remarriage might be committing adultery!

So it goes on, day after day, year after year, eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building, and no one lifts a finger to stop this wicked generation, until the final day of God's wrath.

Lift up your finger, O God! Strike the earth! For on your day of judgment, it will be as easy for you to roll up the heavens like a scroll as it is for you to lift your little finger.

Yes, lift your finger. Save us from this generation! Send out your Holy Spirit, to save us and bring us to repentance. Send your Spirit, to warn and convert the world. And send out your word into every corner of the world, so on the day of judgment, no one will have any excuse.

For truly, they have no excuse. They know the Bible's warnings about hell. They've seen all the highway billboard signs about meeting their Maker. And they just laugh as they drive past.

And it doesn't help when the Pentecostals predict another date for judgment day, or when another false novel like *Left Behind* or *The Shack* tops the bestseller list, or when Christians get obsessed with dumb movies like *Heaven is For Real* or *90 Minutes in Heaven* or whatever is the latest film about someone who supposedly dies and sees the afterlife and comes back.

Maybe if Christians would stop acting so foolishly, if we would boldly preach the pure truth of Scripture, maybe then the world would pay attention. At least then they would have no excuse.

But they do have no excuse, for the law is written on their hearts. And so the whole world will be judged accordingly. For Christ is coming soon, when he will take his seat and judge us all.

Jesus is coming very soon. These are the end times now, ever since he ascended into heaven. Everything is happening, exactly as he predicted. Wars and rumors of wars, famines in various places, earthquakes and natural disasters, persecution getting worse and worse, so that if the days were not cut short for the sake of the elect, no one would be left.

Come soon, Lord Jesus! Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

So pay attention to the warning! Live every day as if today is the day. Any moment, we could see our Lord, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, like lightning flashing from east to west, to roll up the heavens like a scroll, to burn the earth with fire. Then every eye shall see him, and every heart tremble, and every knee shall bow.

On that day, do not be caught unawares, living like the rest of the world. For though the world laughs at you now for your faith, on that day no one will be laughing any more.

And do not let anyone deceive you. We Christians are waiting eagerly for that day, but our eagerness makes us easy to deceive. Don't be fooled. If they say, "Look, there he is!" do not believe it. If they tell you he is in the inner rooms, do not look for him there. And if they tell you they know when he will return, do not listen. For no one knows the day or the hour.

Instead, keep watch. Keep alert. Heed the warning! Repent, and turn from sin, and take refuge in Jesus. Then, in the midst of all the fire and wrath, you will be spared, like Noah and Lot. You will not be swept away. You will find joy and triumph, in the mighty King!

But why is it taking so long? "Come soon, Lord Jesus," the church keeps praying. Why hasn't he come? It's for the sake of the elect. For your sake, so you might turn and repent. As 2 Peter 3 teaches, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

Yes, for your sake, Jesus is holding back his wrath. And he's not wasting his time now. He's there in heaven, interceding for you. Like Abraham of old, who pleaded with God for Lot's sake, that God would spare the city for even ten righteous men. It turned out that there were not even ten, but God still listened to Abraham. He saved Lot. How much more will the Father listen to Jesus pleading for you?

Yes, Jesus is interceding for you, like Moses of old, who pleaded with God for his people, even when they worshipped the golden calf, so soon after God gave the Ten Commandments. Even when God told Moses to step aside so that he could destroy that evil generation, even then God listened to his servant Moses and relented. How much more will he listen to his Son?

Jesus is interceding for us now, pleading to his Father for us sinners. "Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people," he says. And for the sake of his Son, standing in the breach for us, God holds back the coming disaster. He still forgives.

So take heart. Your Lord is patient for your sake. And though it feels like Jesus will never return, the kingdom of God is already here now. The king reigns! His kingdom is here the church! As he said in our gospel reading, "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

The kingdom is in the midst of you. The Pharisees did not realize it, but the king was right there in front of them, speaking to them face to face. His kingdom and his reign were already at hand. He was about to take his throne, on the cross, high and lifted up, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. He was about to wear the crown of thrones and the purple robe.

Yes, his kingdom is here. He is risen. Jesus reigns in the church forever.

So take heart. When you see the world continuing in sin, heedless of the King and his judgment, just as in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot, do not be discouraged. For the King is with you now, in the church, to intercede for you and preserve and strengthen you for the day of wrath. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.