

"Dead-lines"

Text: Matthew 24:37-44

1 John 3:1-2 *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Ever hear of something called FoMO? Evidently the psychiatric community accepts this now as a real and growing problem. It's an acronym for "Fear of Missing Out." It's why so many people check their phones incessantly. It's what drives Facebook and Twitter. Everyone wants to see if there is something better out there than what they are doing at the present. It's why young people check in even when they are on dates. They are afraid there is something better going on that they are missing.

Advertisers use this against us. They love to put countdown meters on their "special sales" and are forever warning us about "deadlines" after which that deal of the century will be gone forever. We all get it, of course. Advertisers want to spur us into buying, and use overly dramatic expressions to instill the fear that we will miss out if we don't "act now!"

Which brings us to the title of the sermon this morning: *"Deadlines."* Rather dramatic when you stop to think of it, isn't it? An assignment is due at school on a certain date and time, and if you miss it you've crossed over a *deadline*. Again, sounds so ominous. Historically, it actually was. The first recorded use had to do with POW camps in the American Civil War. A wooden railing was erected 17 feet from the outer wall of the camp. Any prisoner that went beyond that line was shot – without question and without hesitation. The original truly was, therefore, a deadline.

Our "everything is negotiable" society doesn't seem to put much stock in deadlines any more, does it? We've come to expect that there is an exception to every rule. "Close" is widely regarded as good enough. In fact the concept of deadlines has become so vague that our fellow citizens are filled with righteous indignation when a deadline is actually rigidly enforced. *"Oh come on, that's close enough – isn't it??"*

While missing deadlines in our secular pursuits can be little more than an annoyance, the same is not true in things spiritual. In fact when it comes to spiritual deadlines, far from an exaggeration, the term itself isn't dramatic

enough. Our text for this morning provides examples. That text is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 24th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Matthew 24:37-44** *For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

So far the verbally inspired Word of God. We seek to remind ourselves of just who gave us these words and what we hope to gain from them as we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Did you catch the first "deadline" mentioned in our text? God himself set a deadline for the destruction of the unbelieving world of Noah's day. By the point in time that God sent the floods, Noah had been building the Ark for about 100 years. Understand the incessant, ongoing ridicule that Noah and his family undoubtedly endured. One hundred years came and went not only without the promised flood, the Ark was being constructed in a place where there was no body of water. Worse still, many Bible scholars believe that there was no such thing as rain prior to the flood. Here's the Bible's description of the way things were in Genesis 2:5-7: **"When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground-- ⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."**

So in a land where there was no large body of water and no potential (at least in the mind of man) for such a craft to actually be useful, Noah and his sons labored away on the Ark. Our text described the setting in which Noah and his family labored with these words: **"For as in those**

days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away."

You can understand their skepticism, doubt, and even their ridicule, can't you? In their eyes what Noah and his sons were doing was just plain crazy. The godless went about their faithless lives right up until the moment that God's deadline arrived. Obviously their doubt had no power over God's reality. The fact that they steadfastly refused to believe that the flood would come had no power to prevent that flood. And when it did come, there was absolutely no compromise. God's deadline was truly just that – a line past which there was only death. Mathematicians and Bible scholars tell us that it is very possible – in fact highly likely – that there were billions of people alive on the earth on the day the flood came – billions of souls, therefore, that missed the very deadline that had undoubtedly been held in such derision. All except for 8 human souls. All others perished without mercy and without exception.

Clearly this is a profoundly sobering truth. It is also a wake-up call for believer and unbeliever alike. God had set his deadline, but there was no dramatic change to warn the people that that deadline was fast approaching. Everything went on as it always had – for one hundred years. In fact the passage of time very likely only served to harden the godless in their denial of what was coming. With every passing year they became all the more convinced that Noah was wrong and they were right.

Sound familiar? It should. Each one of you here this morning is a modern-day Noah. The Godless world all around you is firmly convinced – to a man – that God's next deadline is also a myth believed only by the simple-minded. Our text – words spoken by the Son of God himself – draws this very comparison: ***For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.***

Don't cheat yourself by passing lightly over this dramatic truth. Just as it seemed that the deadline that God had established for the sending of the Flood would never arrive, so too Jesus himself warns here us that the unbelieving world will also ignore and ridicule his last great deadline – earth's final and complete destruction and the coming of the great Day of Judgment.

So why bring up something like this in this particular setting. Here, after all, we are surrounded by others who believe just as we do. Here we are not in the midst of godless skeptics but of those who share a common conviction that, just as God kept his first promise to send his Son to pay our sin debt, so too will he keep his final promise that that same Son of God will return to judge the living and the dead. So why bring up this truth while we are in the safe confines of our Christian fellowship?

The answer is that arguably our greatest threat in this regard isn't from the outside but from the inside; it isn't "out there," it's in here – that old Adam or sinful flesh that will cling to us until we are called home. It is, in fact, our own flesh that often makes the most reasonable and persuasive arguments for giving up and going along. It's our own sinful self that hears the doubt and scorn of the world around us, and *agrees*, and then lobbies for the same. There is an evil within each of us that actually wants us to join the other side. It buys into the world's talking points and whispers reasonable arguments in our own ears: *"What if the world is right? What if religion really is just so much mythology and we are the ones who have it all wrong? It's been almost 2000 years since Christ promised to return. If he really is coming, shouldn't he have been here by now?"*

Our Savior's words in our text remind us that the teeming masses of Noah's day probably offered up the same reasonable arguments – right up until the deadline arrived and the doors of the Ark were sealed. At that moment, the rage of the flood must have seemed as nothing compared to the horror that washed over them in the realization that they were wrong. Dead wrong. Noah's family, trusting God's promise, lived. The others – *all* the others – realized their tragic mistake only when it was far too late. And died.

Beat your old Adam into submission with this truth. The very same scenario will, without question, be repeated. Another deadline will arrive. Jesus Christ will return ***"on the clouds with power and great glory."*** All who at that moment are living in denial of the Son of God will view that day with abject horror. Suddenly and without warning nothing in their entire existence will have any value, any worth. All on that day would gladly trade all that they have for what you have, right this very moment.

You and I need to see this world with divinely trained eyes. We need to see that there is not only a looming deadline coming we know not when, there is right here and right now another sort of "deadline." This one is a line of death – vast hoards of the godless marching confidently

to their own eternal destruction. The only souls not walking in that terrible, tragic procession are those that know and believe that faith in Jesus Christ is our ark. As the very same waters that destroyed the world also saved Noah and his family by lifting them safely above the destruction, so also Jesus Christ is the key. Those that believe in him will be saved by him; those who do not will be destroyed by him. Proximity to other Christians will save no one. It's the difference between inside and outside the ark. Believing friends and family members will be of no help. God knows those that are his. So also our text tells us: ***Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.*** One thing, and one thing alone will matter. When that final deadline arrives, did you or did you not pass from this world believing that Jesus Christ, God's Son, rendered the full and complete payment for all of your sins when he offered his perfect life on Calvary's cross. Those who deny are, even now, in the dead-line. Those who believe are even now in the possession of a life that will never end. They march, even now, in that great procession of the saints of old and follow to where our Savior himself has gone.

One final word of wisdom we glean from our text. Many who even now shuffle along in the dead-line seek to calm their night-terrors with the idea that there is plenty of time. They buy into the devil's own lie that there will come a day – typically when they are much older – when perhaps all of that "religion stuff" will be right for them. They assure themselves that they will extricate themselves from the procession of the damned, but only when the time seems right; only when they are good and ready. This too our Savior addressed in our text: ***But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*** Unfortunately, tragically, the tomorrow of unbelief is always the same as today. "Always tomorrow," is never. "Good intentions" is just another way to spell "failure."

Thanks be to God it is not so among you – you who even now look not to your own goodness but trust that the goodness of Jesus Christ has washed you of your sin. You know and believe that you are even now an heir of heaven solely because of what the Son of God has done for you, in your place, as your substitute. You are not in the dead-line; you walk the path of life eternal.

One last thing. Call out, reach out, to those in the dead-line as they shuffle past – before that great and terrible final deadline arrives. You are, after all, their only hope. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 2:1-5** The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

^{ESV} **Romans 13:11-14** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The First Sunday in Advent – November 27, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 705 (Brown Hymnal)

"Come O Long-Expected Jesus"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 2:1-5) It is more often true than not that it takes eyes of faith to see the truth. This is certainly true in our first lesson this morning, where the Holy Spirit through Isaiah gives a preview of the rise of Christianity and the peace which comes to those who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. God grant us always such wisdom and insight

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 13:11-14) Our New Testament Lesson warns against the very sins that are most common among the Godless during the holiday season we have just entered. Let it not be so among us. Our Lord came to sacrifice Himself for us. The Appropriate response from each of us is to live each moment as His ambassadors, and to serve as lights in a sin-darkened world. As always, we want to do this not out of fear but out of love for our Savior and for the souls that he came to save.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 63 (Red Hymnal)

"On Jordan's Bank"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 24:37-44 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Dead-lines"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 56 (Verses 1&5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (43) Ave (48) Wednesday (29)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Wednesday	-5:30 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Timothy Wheaton has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids, MI. Pastor Michael Wilke is considering the call to Zion of Atlanta.

Church Council Notes – The Church Council met last Sunday. All members plus the Pastor were present. As requested by members, the start time for the Christmas Eve service was moved to 5 pm. A draft 2017 Budget was presented, calling for a 2.2% increase. Treasurer Adams reported that YTD offerings at the end of October were \$3,200 behind budgeted needs. The Annual Voters' Meeting has been scheduled for Sunday, December 18. The Church Council is looking for a volunteer to look into a Facebook page for St Paul. The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for December 11.

Confirmation Class – Confirmation parents and students please note that the start time for Confirmation classes during Advent is 5:30 pm.

Advent Services – Our midweek Advent services begin this Wednesday for the next three weeks.

Usher/Cleaner List – The first draft of the 2017 Usher/Cleaner list is on the mailbox table. Please take a look and make Fred Adams aware of any changes that need to be made.