

Thief Jesus

King of Glory Lutheran
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November 26-27, 2022

Year A: First Sunday of Advent

Matthew 24:36-44 [Jesus said to the disciples,] ³⁶“About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner 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. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Beloved of God, Happy New Year! We enter the season of Advent with Jesus telling us to be watchful and ready. In fact, He even says, He will be like a thief in the night and none of us knows when He will return.

I remember coming home from a family vacation and our house had been broken into. Hopefully none of you have had that experience, but it is truly a vulnerable feeling, knowing that some stranger has been in a space that is precious to you. A family home is like a sanctuary that gets desecrated when you see all your drawers and closets opened with their contents on the floor. These thieves have taken away objects that are more than objects. These items are treasured.

The element of surprise I remember as a child, was not a welcome one. It felt dark and creepy. Now, houses are equipped with many and various security systems; meant to keep unwanted thieves away. You and I are well acquainted with Ring cameras on doorbells that capture not only Christmas package thieves, but as in my sisters' case, the occasional turkey as well. No, that was not the one we had for Thanksgiving dinner!

You might remember two weekends ago, when the disciples were asking Jesus when His return might be. In today's text Jesus finally gives them an answer, though it's not likely the one they want to hear. “About that hour or day, no one knows.” Period. Not me, Jesus the Son. Not the angels. Only the Father knows when I shall return.

Jesus says, “In the time of Noah, people were living their lives like normal when the flood struck.” There was no time for preparations. No time for repentance or extra prayers.

In the image of someone left in the field and one taken, again note the surprise separation. Jesus doesn't indicate anything about judgement or reward as is commonly thought of with this passage. The focus of Jesus' statements here is truly about living in a readied state for God's unexpected activity to happen.

The mark of the ancient disciples and we moderns is to not live an unaware, life-as-usual state. We must realize and remember God is at work all the time. God is saving, God is healing, God is forgiving and restoring continually. God is standing in solidarity with the poor and suffering. Therefore, Jesus calls us to keep awake! Be ready, anticipating God's unexpected arrival. Keep one eye on the house door and the other on your day-to-day lives.

The challenge becomes that we simply don't know when Jesus will arrive. How do we keep one eye on the house door and the other on wrapping presents permanently? In our data driven lives, in a world full of artificial intelligence, satellites, computers and these little things we carry around in our pockets, we strive to know everything possible about everything possible constantly!

Not so, says our Lord. Expect the unexpected. Or in other words, be ready, to not know. Jesus doesn't know. The angels don't know. We simply don't know when Jesus will arrive like a thief in the night.

Rev. Nadia-Bolz Weber turns Jesus' story around with a new twist. She says, *"this God in which we live and move and have our being is not interested in our loss-prevention programs, but in saving us from ourselves and our culture and even our certainties about the(Christmas) story itself. This holy thief wants to steal from us and maybe that is literal and metaphoric at the same time. Because in this season of pornographic levels of consumption in which our credit card debts rise and our waistbands expand, maybe the idea that Jesus wants to break in and jack some of your stuff is really good news."*

She continues, *I started thinking this week that maybe we should make Advent lists -- kind of like Christmas lists, but instead of things we want Santa to bring us, we write down what we want Christ to take from us. You know, in hopes he could pickpocket the stupid junk in our houses, or abscond with our self-loathing or resentment ... maybe break in and take off with our compulsive eating or our love of money in the middle of the night. Don't you kind of long for God to do something unexpected?"* (<https://sojo.net/articles/thieving-christ-and-advent>)

Don't we long for God to do something unexpected? "Yes, Jesus! Come on in!" We might even leave the front door open! "Steal that old, harmful memory. Rob us from not being able to forgive ourselves. Raid our hearts and make them your own! Please take are all the stupid comments, the lagging depression, the PTS that lurks inside, and all that stuff in the garage that never gets used!"

Now wouldn't that be a good thing? That would be very good news!

He does it all the time, you know. Jesus steals from us. Each time, our meek hearts utter the words, 'I'm sorry,' He is there like a thief in the night throwing that wrongly placed word, or action into the farthest limits of the sea, so we might never find it again.

The problem, is, we often pretend we still own it. We continue to assume that Jesus hasn't stolen it at all. Because we are so used to being in control of everything all the time.

Like it or not, we might tend towards the self-occupied during Advent. Our consumer culture keeps reminding us of the event that is coming...Christmas. It tells us how we ought to prepare. Yet it says nothing about the babe – the Incarnate One – to be born for the world and born within. Jesus who changes everything with His appearing.

Perhaps on this first weekend of Advent, instead of trying to make every preparation just perfect – the right gift for him or her. Perhaps, we could begin to ready our spirits for God's unexpected activity in our lives and world.

Jesus comes to save us from ourselves. He wants to take all that which holds us captive, the control which we crave to keep our lives stable and lifeless. God calls us to open the front door to our hearts that there could be true life and surprising life and the life we can only have with Jesus.

Therefore, there is a sticky note on the front of your bulletin. Take a moment of silence now, and jot down a few things you want Jesus to steal from you this Advent. It is yours alone, we won't share. Then I would invite you to offer those things to our Savior in prayer. Amen.