

Sermon ✝ November 27, 2022  
Matthew 24:36-44  
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Have you ever been caught? Have you ever been told not to do something . . . but you did it anyway. . . and then you were discovered? I know that some of you have heard this story before . . . but it's a good one.

I was 13 years old. My best friends lived a few doors away: Tommy (15) & Bobby (14). Their parents ran a dry cleaning business in Kenosha and worked incredibly long hours. It was a few weeks before Christmas and they still hadn't time to put up their Christmas tree. The boys told their parents they would take care of it. The answer was an emphatic, "NO"! Reason being, they always flocked their Christmas tree and it was a job for grown ups.

The boys, of course, figured they knew better and so they decided to set up the tree to surprise their parents. They asked me to help. So, on the Saturday prior to the third Sunday in Advent, we hauled the large balsam fir into the house and dragged it through kitchen, dining room and living room until we maneuvered it into the stand in their sunroom. I should mention that the house was a small 1930's bungalow with beautiful wide oak trim adorning all of the windows and doorways.

Once the tree was in place it was time to begin the flocking. It was kind of an interesting process which involved a special spray jar that was attached to their Electrolux canister vacuum cleaner. The flocking solution was something akin to a mixture of water, Elmer's glue and Ivory Flakes laundry detergent. As soon as the solution was thoroughly mixed, we commenced the flocking process.

At this point I need to remind you that we were 13, 14, & 15 year old boys. Prior to flocking we hadn't even considered covering the walls or woodwork with old sheets or newspaper. We somehow assumed that the gooey, sticky flocking solution would only adhere to the tree branches. Halfway through the application, we stopped for a moment to admire our work only to discover that we had flocked the windows, the blinds, the crown molding and, most unfortunately, Tweetie Bird, their pet parakeet. I will never forget the moment that their mom unexpectedly appeared in the sunroom doorway.

It was sometime before I was allowed back in their house. I do know that much of the woodwork had to be stripped and refinished, new windows coverings purchased and a somber funeral was held for poor Tweetie Bird.

In retrospect, it sure would have been much better if we had been caught quietly playing checkers.

Today we begin the season of Advent. And one of the themes of this season is preparation. But we're talking here about a different kind of preparation than most of us think about at this time of year. Advent is the season of preparation. We are to prepare for the coming King. And this doesn't simply mean baking cookies or stringing lights or buying presents. Advent is about greater things.

Advent themes include hope and expectation (waiting). We are hopeful that the king will come

again. And as we wait for the king . . . we make preparations for his coming.

And so . . . believing that our Lord will come again . . . we are to make good use of the time that we have . . . for we do not know when that time will come. Both the Second lesson and the Gospel for this day share the common theme of being prepared. Given all of this . . . we need to consider a couple of things.

Do we really pay attentions to such warnings? I am always amazed at how many people ignore tornado warnings. And I remember very well how hard I cried after burning my hand on my grandmother's wood-burning cook stove, immediately after she warned me not to touch it. And, of course, we all know that a 55 mph speed limit really means that you can drive 60.

Now if we don't pay attention to tornado sirens . . . or the law . . . or even our grandmothers . . . are we going to listen to some well-intentioned ancient like St. Paul.

That is the first part of the problem. We just don't listen. We live our lives as if all of this somehow doesn't apply to our lives or our situation. And we really do need to get over this kind of arrogance.

Okay . . . let's just say that we do heed the word of scripture that entreats us to "watch and be on guard". How do we spend our time while we are waiting? What do we do with our time?

We do our day-to-day work . . . whatever that might be. We eat and sleep. We do many things for others but I am sure that if we were to chart our usage of our time the results would be very interesting.

And how do we sound while we are waiting? Are we pretty much content with life considering that it is filled with uncertainties, illness, accidents, death . . . joy, fulfillment, peace? Or does life stink? Does everybody else have it better! Is life the pits? Sadly. . . I hear this from all too many people.

Advent reminds us of the need to re-assess our lives. It is a penitential season . . . much like Lent. As one who often touches the lives of those who are sick or near death or experiencing emotional distress, I tend to look at my own life from a much different perspective than I used to.

The time is short and we all need to make better use of the time and gifts that God has given us. And the really neat thing is that its not too late. We are a redeemed and forgiven people . There is still time to make some needed changes. But we need to be on guard, for we don't have forever.

As you consider your own spiritual journey through this Advent season, I would like you to keep a mental daily log. How are you using your time and how do you sound while you are waiting? And what is it that our Lord will find you doing when he unexpectedly returns?

Will you stand before our Lord with white Christmas tree flocking all over your face? *Or* will you be found at prayer and living a life worthy of God's love?

Amen.