

Luke 17:20-30

In recent years, our Homeland Security has developed a color-coded alert system to warn us in case of terrorist attacks. When green is issued, it means that all is well. Blue indicates a slight threat of terrorist activities. Yellow means that the threat is much more pronounced. Orange indicates that an attack is almost certainly coming; and red, as the highest alert stage, means that an attack is upon us. The system works, however, only if Homeland Security has knowledge of what the terrorists are planning, and if the American people take heed when the warnings are given. We have had days this year when the color was orange, but I doubt if any of us changed our plans for the day. We continued “business as usual” even though we were being warned that terrorists were planning an attack against us. And attacks have come without any warning—Pearl Harbor...9/11—because we had no knowledge of what the enemy was planning.

Now God is not our enemy, and so we would do well to heed the warnings He gives us. Judgment Day is coming and if we’re not ready, what the Japanese did to Pearl Harbor and what Bin Laden did to the World Trade Center towers, will pale in comparison to the misery and destruction of that final day.

Jesus tells us in Luke 17 that the days before the Final Judgment will be just like the days of Noah and Lot. What were the people doing during those days? “They were eating and drinking,” He says, “They were marrying, they were buying and selling, planting and building.” They were doing these things, Jesus says, “up to the day when they were all destroyed.”

Now we know that the people in Noah’s day and in Lot’s day were living wicked and immoral lives, so why doesn’t Jesus mention this? There’s nothing wrong with eating and drinking, with buying and selling, with planting and building, and with getting married. And yet, these are the things Jesus mentions. This was a list of their activities day-in and day-out, up to the very day they were destroyed.

Were they destroyed because they were doing these things? No...and they would have said, “What’s wrong with eating and drinking, with buying, and building, and getting married?” The problem was not with the list of things they were doing. The problem was with what was not on the list. There was no worship of God. There was no time spent hearing His Word. And therefore, there was no repenting, no turning to the Lord. They weren’t destroyed because of what they were doing; they were destroyed because of what they were not doing.

Noah was building an ark, but they didn’t care. By his building of God’s ark, Noah was preaching to the people. The ark was a warning that God’s judgment was coming. First, the outer structure was put in place. Then came more timbers to fill in the inner parts of the ark. Wood was being sawn and hammered, until finally the ark was complete. But the people did not heed the warnings. The colors went from green, to blue, to yellow, to orange...and then, when the animals came two-by-two, the color changed to red. God’s judgment was imminent. But not one repented. Not one listened to the Word of God preached by Noah.

And so today, people are occupied with hunting, and camping, with preparing meals, with riding 4-wheelers, with working at the job, and taking care of the yard, and so forth. And they would say, “What’s wrong with doing these things!” And there’s nothing wrong with such a list of activities. But when this is the list of our life’s activities, then we are just like the people in the days of Noah and Lot—because the problem is with what is missing from the list. When God is building His ark here as His Word is preached and taught, and His Sacraments are given, but we live our life over there so that our life consists of everything but the preaching of God’s Word...we resemble, not Noah and Lot, but the people around them whom God destroyed in His righteous judgment.

Whenever that church bell rings, that is the sound of wood being hammered into place. These are the final days before the flood of God’s judgment. God is building His ark, not out there in the world, but here within His Church—where His voice is calling sinners to repentance. The flood is coming. We don’t know if the color is yellow, orange, or red. We don’t know when Christ will appear like lightning. We don’t know when His ark will be completed; when God will have brought all of His elect into the safety of her walls. But God knows, and He warns us to stay, like Noah, with the ark. No other place is safe. No other place will preserve us when the final flood comes.

But you, friend, do not need to fear. God has pulled you, in your baptism, into the safety of His ark. Here He nourishes you with His body and blood. Here He sustains your faith with His living Word. He will not leave you to perish in the floodwaters of Judgment. He will not let the fire and brimstone destroy you. He has called you by name. He has drawn you to Himself in Christ Jesus. You are safe here with your Savior.

You have a place here with Christ in God’s ark even if you do not feel that you are worthy. God will never reject you for your many sins. He will not throw you off His ship as Jonah was thrown into the stormy seas. No matter how sinful your life has been, your place is here with Christ because Christ took your place on the cross. He already faced the flood of God’s anger for you. He already felt the pain of hell’s fire and brimstone for you. He faced God’s righteous judgment in your place, and that’s why your place is here in the safety of God’s grace. Here, where God gives you His Word and Sacraments, there are no storms of judgment—there is only forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Noah and his family were saved not because they avoided eating and drinking, buying and selling, and being given in marriage, but because they stayed with the ark. They were busy working and living, but their place was in God’s boat, and so they were saved from destruction. Your place is also within God’s Church, not because we’re good and noble, but because Christ died for you, and so He gives you a place here with Him—a place in His font, a place at His Table, a place in heaven. You are forgiven by your God; your place is in Christ and with Christ.

We weren’t there when Pearl Harbor was attacked. We weren’t there when the twin towers fell. We didn’t hear the screaming and see death all around us. But we will be there in the Final Judgment. We will be there when the last flood comes. We will be there when hell unleashes its fire and brimstone in its full fury. But like Noah, we will be safe within God’s ark; safe within His Church; safe with Christ. Like Lot, God will lead us out of harm’s way as this world is destroyed—and it’s not because we’re better people than anyone else out

there—it's by the grace and mercy of God alone that He has drawn you and keeps drawing you here where His voice is heard; here where His forgiveness is given.

That ark brought Noah and his family to a safe, beautiful new world. And that is God's promise to you in Christ. You will not be disappointed. Stay in the ark. He will land you safe in heaven for Jesus' sake. Amen.