

“Flood Waters”
June 15, 2008
Geneseo United Methodist Church
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Luke 17:26-35 ²⁶ Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them ³⁰ -- it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. ³² Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left."

I don't know how many of you have had time to keep up with the stock market lately. There has been enough other stuff to keep us busy, sandbagging, vacuuming, moving furniture, tearing up carpet, all that fun stuff that we might call "spring cleaning." But something I noticed this week, that I think I need to share with you are two sectors in the market that are doing good. Of course you all know that oil continues to rise, but the second area took me by surprise. Lumber prices are soaring. I looked a little closer to figure out what was driving the market and I found out there has been a huge increase in demand for Gopher wood, (the same wood that Noah used.)

Well I was going to go in a very different direction with this sermon, but I guess I felt like I was overwhelmed by our community circumstances to preach about all this water.

But what can I say, that makes any sense, what gives us answers, what gives us comfort to deal with the encroachment of water into every corner of our life. What helps us understand why we cannot go about our life as usual, why we find road blocks, mandatory evacuations, sandbags and endless cloudy skies?

I cannot tell you that I have the answers, but I can tell you that the rain and flood, no matter how devastating to our lives, afford us the opportunity to look at how we are living every day, and what is truly important.

In Luke 17, Jesus gives us a picture of what it will be like when the trumpet sounds and we see him returning in the clouds. Some of you have heard of that day referred to as the rapture, or the return of Christ, here Jesus talks about it as the day of the Son of Man. It is a day that is yet to come, a day of great destruction, but a day of great hope. It is the day that people who believe in Jesus will meet him in the clouds, see the pearly gates, and kneel before the throne of God; A great day, and a terrible day, depending on our perspective.

For Jesus to set the stage in this passage, he refers back to the five-hundred year flood of his day, or maybe that should be called the seven thousand year flood. He brings up the name of Noah. Then he goes on to tell us how oblivious and unprepared the people were. The people in Noah's day were eating, drinking, getting married, basically going about their daily life as usual, unaware that anything was about to change. (I might mention, this is all despite the fact that they can see Noah building a huge ark in his back yard)

Another famous disaster Jesus referred to was the destruction of fire that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Guess what they were doing to get ready. "They were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building." Again, going about their daily business, not bothering anyone

Was anything different here in Iowa over the last month? What about the people in Parkersburg. They were just going about their lives as usual. They didn't have time to grab their wallet, or any precious memorabilia. The tornado came upon them that fast, and the fact that most survived was amazing.

Now the rains have been a constant burden to us, most of us have had some basement water to deal with, but the flood of this last week on top of the tornado earlier should have opened the eyes of many.

In this passage, Jesus tells us that the day of the Son of Man will be like these days of disaster, people will not see it coming, they will be going about their daily lives oblivious to the coming destruction.

Now, I must say, one thing that I have noticed is that most people have become very aware of how blessed we are. I spoke with many people this week who had water in their basement, had to tear up carpet, or throw out furniture. However, despite the difficulty, most people realize that their situation is small when compared to the bigger picture in Iowa. They even go so far as to say, "these material possessions don't matter, we still have our lives and our family."

That is a new concept for Americans to think that way. In some cases it is a new concept for preachers to preach that way; those who preach the "prosperity gospel," that God want to bless the faithful. What do they preach that after the rash of disasters that we have endured? Is God telling us that everyone who has been effected is not faithful, or does not deserve his blessing?

I don't think that at all. In my perspective, it is a good thing that we are able to thank God in every circumstance, even in the difficult times. But there is one element of this passage and of our disaster situation that most people just don't think about.

You see, Jesus used these disasters to set the stage for the last day and final judgment. He told the disciples that on the day of His glorious return, that humanity will be going about our business as usual. We will be working, eating, getting married or giving our children in marriage; He said we will be in the field, at school, working or playing. Basically we will not be ready. I think he is right, (I guess it is a good thing that the pastor agrees with Jesus) because I don't think most of us even think about that coming day, the day of the Son of Man.

So let me ask you a couple questions. How many of you are ready to see God face to face? How many of you have all your affairs in order? How many of you feel like you are ready to stand before the judgment throne of God? Are you confident in your eternal residence?

Hmm, are those questions that you think about every day? I doubt it. And that is exactly why Jesus says we will not be ready. We are going about our daily lives not considering the fact that we are on an intersect course with flood waters of eternity.

Sure, all that has happened lately has made me thankful for what I have, but it has also caused me to, as Don Hayes might say it, “ponder the ramifications of my eternal preparedness.” Otherwise stated, am I ready to stand face to face with God?

I am convinced that no one here is going to get to decide when that day will come. We don't know at what age we will stand before his throne. We may think we can wait and live our life different in a few years, but we don't know. In the tragedies recently, death did not come only for those of a ripe age. There were 4 young boy scouts and many other young that encountered the end to their life on this earth. How horrible, and it flies in the face of the way we think things should be. Were they ready?

Death is something we will each face, whether you are ready to admit it or not. On top of that is this promise that Jesus made, the promise that he will return. It should frighten us just a little that Jesus said several times that he will come on a day that we are not expecting him, we will be going about business as usual.

But here is the final crux of this passage for me. Listen close! Jesus said, “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.”

This passage sets my stomach to churning. A husband and wife in bed, and one will be taken, the other left behind. Two friends working side by side, one is taken, the other is left behind. What is wrong with this picture. We may not be ready for the day of Jesus return, but I darn well know that I don't want my wife, or myself to be left behind. I would not want to be working with a friend and have one of us left behind.

This passage says that people we are close to will be left behind. You know, the only way that can happen is if we don't tell them about Jesus' love, if we don't give them the opportunity to hear about the good news of salvation.

Now I don't care what you think about inviting people to church, or sharing your faith with your friends, (That is not true, I do care) but I do know that I don't want to be the one in heave dealing with survivor's guilt. I don't want to be the one who mourns all the people that got left behind. No matter how difficult sharing your faith is, I would tell you it has got to be easier than being caught up in the clouds to meet Jesus and looking down to see your loved ones left behind because they were not ready.

Now Fathers, lest you think that I am not including you in the message on Father's day, I am. As I mentioned in the children's time, it is your responsibility to love, to teach, and to discipline your children in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to raise your family so that they are ready to meet God face to face every day.

What about you, are you going about your life as usual? Have the recent events opened up your eyes to see that the day of Christ's return is coming? Can you look around with a measure of objectivity and realize that you have friends and family who are going to be left behind?

I pray that the flood waters will not only make us thankful for what we have, but that they may cause us to do a little thinking about the future, and give us courage to get ourselves and our friends a little more ready for the day of the Son of Man. Amen.