

Sermon – Matthew 24:36-44  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
1 Advent – Year A  
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“I Feel Fine”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Today is the First Sunday of Advent, and my family has been waiting for this season of waiting for quite some time now. Today is the day that we finally got to open the first compartment of our Harry Potter LEGO Advent calendar. Sure, we already owned four other LEGO Advent calendars, but those aren't in a magical world of witchcraft and wizardry. Fortunately, day one was a good day; we're off to a good start with a minifigure of Harry Potter himself. Over the next 23 days we will open 23 more compartments and build 23 more miniature LEGO builds. The Advent countdown that begins today will run like clockwork, moving us toward the celebration of Christmas. At a predicted day and time, we will gather to sing of our Savior's birth, as we do each year. This is as it should be – a time of waiting culminating in moving moments of praise and proclamation. For Christ is born – already. It is good to remember our past waiting, to recall God's fulfillment of our hopes and dreams.
2. For just this reason, the words spoken to us on the First Sunday of Advent are always surprising. Jesus offers no calendar, no countdown to what will come next: “About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” And what will the Day of the Lord bring about? Two will be in the field, and two grinding meal; one of each will be taken, and one left. It will be like in the days of Noah, humanity heedless of the disaster that was about to befall them, a disaster of their own making.

The Son of Man – an apocalyptic title for Messiah – will not arrive well-announced or counted down. He will come like a thief in the night. The owner of the home will have no ability to prepare. So keep awake!

3. As we prepare for Christmas, Jesus preaches the Day of the Lord that will herald the end of the world. It is jarring, perhaps, to hear these words as we've just begun to trim our trees and deck our halls. It is jarring, and it should be. We wonder why Jesus – the Baby of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace – would need to break into our homes in the middle of the night. But why do we wonder? While we go about our business, be it the everyday or the holiday sort, we manage to ignore the fact that we are both hostage and captor; we are trapped, bound both by and in our sin. We hear these words of Jesus and wonder how a loving God could ever speak about the end of the world, pretending that we don't know full well that we are the ones who are doing so much damage to God's good world. And yes, I mean all that we have done to the environment, to the plants and animals for whom this world is the only home. But I mean much more than that, too. For we have harmed each other, continue to harm each other; we mar the *imago dei* in which we were created. We have created a world in which some people matter, and other people don't – and in that kind of world, no one matters much or for long. We are trapped in systems and cycles of violence and oppression. There is, it seems, no end in sight.
4. We don't need a God who will come through the front door and appeal to the better angels of our nature. Those angels stopped listening long ago. No, we might not want such a Savior, but the Messiah we need is the one that we get, thanks be to God. It is Jesus, who speaks of the Day of the Lord which is not first a day yet to come, but a Friday that happened long ago. A Friday when he climbed a lonely hill and took up a cross that belonged to you and to me, standing in our place and using the cover of our sin and brokenness to break into the stronghold of death and the devil – to blow it up once and for all in

- an inside job. He needed to come like a thief in the night; had he rung the doorbell neither you nor I would have let him in. We would have been too busy clinging to the false life we'd created in this world to believe his promise in a better world to come.
5. A better world to come – this is where we have to begin. This is why we can't live from the middle. In faith, we have to live from the end. From my point of view today, I have too much to lose. My life, after all, seems pretty good. Or at least that's what I tell myself. And that's why God in Christ steals that life from us, puts it to death, to give us something better. This is why the Son of Man snatches us out of our worldly relationships – to reconfigure us, resurrect us, for a new destination. Writing of the destination, the *telos*, and our new identity, Robert W. Jenson writes: "The point of identity, infinitely approachable and infinitely to be approached, the enlivening *telos* of the Kingdom's own life, is perfect harmony between the conversation of the redeemed and the conversation that God is. In the conversation God is, meaning and melody are one." What Jenson hits on the head here is the simple fact that our lives are out of tune, and willingly so. But Jesus, the thief in the night, the crucified-but-now-raised Messiah has redeemed us, fitting our lives into the unending song of God.
  6. We live in a world whose current way of being needs to come to an end. Not through our abuse of the world, but to save it from our abuse. To save us from ourselves. To save us from giving into the false belief that the point of life is to control life, to mark time for ourselves, to gain at the expense of others. These are the lies of sin that Jesus died to, the lies that he was raised to expose. To quote another favorite theologian, N.T. Wright, the point of Jesus' return in the future is to show forth in the present that "Jesus is Lord and Caesar isn't." Yes, the powers that rule and rage and hold us captive appear awfully powerful. But they don't get the last word, for every Caesar, every power, is nothing more than an empty shell. Jesus is Lord. Whatever

happens in this world in the meantime, Jesus shall reign. This world needs to end. Not through disaster, but through hope. This world of violence, of swords and spears, needs to give way in faith to the life of hope. Only in hope, through faith in Christ, can we transform weapons of war into plow shares and pruning hooks. Only in hope, through faith in Christ, can we proclaim the Kingdom that is to come one day by living for that Kingdom's sake in our broken world now.

7. It's not easy to be faithful as the world fall apart around us. So what do we do? Well, having quoted two favorite theologians, I give you a third: Princess Anna of Arendelle. Her frozen fictitiousness notwithstanding, Anna gets it right. In despair as everything collapses around her, she wonders what to do next. Even as her world looked like it was coming to an end, her path was clear. It remained her call to do the next right thing. And the next right thing after that. Good wisdom from this Disney princess.
8. We don't know what the future holds, and the world around us is falling apart. So has it ever been. So it was in the days of Noah. So it is today. And no amount of tinsel or paper can cover that reality. But as in Noah's days, it wasn't the world's end that defined the world. It was God's saving activity that was determinative. God saved Noah, and seven others in his family. Eight in all. And through the waters of this eight-sided font, God has saved you and me, just as God saves Caroline today. We likely wouldn't have let him enter our house as a proper guest. No matter; he snuck in through the side door of death to bring us into life. We have been saved for the next world, whenever it will come. Keep the faith. And we are freed to live in this world, by Christ and for his sake, whatever will come. Keep the faith. Do the next right thing. It is not given to us to know the mysteries of the future. There's no calendar to mark the time. So it goes. Isaiah bids us follow the One who came after him. It's the end of the world as we know it and even now, a new world dawns even now. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.