

St. John Lutheran Church

The Sermon

Rev. Andy Rutrough

Sermon, November 27, 2022

Luke 24:36-44

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus says, “Keep watch, keep awake. You don’t know when I am coming.” This applies to when Jesus is coming back someday, and it applies to when Jesus comes to us every day.

So, last summer, Rebecca Dimon, who used to be our parish administrator, hosted our community yard sale. She’s done this for several years. We rent people a parking space for \$20.00 and they come, sell their stuff. They keep the money and we take that rent money and give it to some form of God’s work in our community.

This is a great event. Each Saturday in August the parking lot is full of people. The ladies of the church have a café which they run from Diehl Hall kitchen. The quilting group sells quilting crafts. It’s a huge thing.

This year, we supported the Hope Buss, which, among many other services, provides food to people who are shelterless, and families who are in hard times.

During the community yard sale, Rebecca took me aside and said, “You know, the Hope Buss could use a kitchen, and we haven’t been using your kitchen in Young Hall by the gym lately. This is true. I can count on my hands the number of times that kitchen has been used to cook a substantial amount of food in the last five years.

I went “Oh, boy. That kitchen is the domain of the ladies of the church. They hosted wedding receptions from there and funeral dinners. They blessed literally thousands of people by the food they made. People might think that work and that kitchen are not important to us any more. This is going to be a hard sell. “

But we looked into it. Stayschelle Bussy came and talked with the ladies of the church. We drew up some questions, some of which we have answered, not all. We have a task force to keep track of issues and communications. And executive committee of Council approved that Hope Buss could use the kitchen for Thanksgiving.

So, some days before Thanksgiving, Nannie Croney, the program lead for Hope Buss calls me up and says, "Pr. Andy, can we drop off some sweet potatoes in the kitchen?" I say, "Sure." Nannie is twenty-eight years old and has three-inch sparkly nails. She shows up with eight of these big, forty-to-fifty-pound boxes of sweet potatoes. I help her a bit but she is heaving these boxes around, loading them in.

And all my stereotypes about young women with sparkly three-inch nails go flying out the window. So, I wrote it up in St. John Happenings, our E-news because that was a God-moment for me.

Watch for the God-moments. Stay awake. Watch for when Jesus comes.

The Gospel of Matthew, which we will be reading for about a year now, shows us what Jesus is like, so that we can recognize him when he comes to us. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the heir to King David from of old. Magi come bringing gifts. But the king from of old is a different kind of king from what we usually expect. This king is a refugee king.

King Herod lies and murders in an attempt to keep his grip on power. Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus have to run away from Bethlehem because Herod has sent his henchmen to murder Jesus. They flee to Egypt as refugees.

Strange, that they should find refuge in Egypt. Egypt is known as the place that enslaved the Hebrew people, and out of fear, treated them horribly, even killed their children. But now Egypt becomes the place of refuge, the haven of safety for the Christ Child. In other words, when we repent, when the Holy Spirit turns us from being oppressors into being safe shelter, this refugee king, the heir of King David, forgives.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the New Moses. You remember, the Old Moses went up on the mountain and brought down the Ten Commandments, the

instruction from God in how to live as a community. Now Jesus brings the fulfillment of that instruction. He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

That is, blessed are you, if you have no fire in your belly left. If you feel like you have no Spirit left within you. If the evil of the world or troubles in your family or the stress of finances or the hard sadness of your own soul seem greater than anything you could possibly overcome, still, there is good news for you. Because it’s not just about you. God is close. Jesus is present, and the Bible’s promise still shines. Love will win.

Jesus says, “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus stands up to people who are hurting him and others. He says, “This is going to be work, this is not going to be easy. It will be like carrying a cross.” At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus comes in his glory and separates the nations as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he says to one side, “I was hungry and you gave me food.”

That’s the picture of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. That is how we will recognize him, from that picture. So we stay awake. We keep watch for that Jesus whom we find in Scripture because that Jesus is coming, someday, we don’t know when.

Also, he comes nowadays. At the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “Behold, look, I am with you, even to the end of the age.” Jesus is not only coming someday, but is coming this day. He is with us right now. Keep watch so you don’t miss him.

Well, I went to check on the kitchen yesterday. The floor needed some mopping and the counters some wiping but the dishes were cleaned and everything was in order. I called Nannie and we mopped and wiped together, because no good thing ever happens without bumps. When we work with Jesus, there are always issues to be dealt with. When Jesus had his last supper, somebody prepared the food, just like our ladies put out the bread and wine. Somebody set the table, just like our ladies set up the altar cloths. Being ready for Jesus takes work, and sometimes risk. And there are always bumps.

Nevertheless, last Sunday I stopped by to help do some of the cooking. There were folks all in the kitchen. A sorority of Black women from their thirties to their seventies were in there watching a football game and getting cornbread and mashed

potatoes ready to cook. Nannie Croney had the rest of us out in the A-room sorting the sweet potatoes into bags of fifteen each to be given out. A young family with two children showed up from the community. The mom said that it was hard to find opportunities for kids to volunteer.

So now, her two kids are helping. One of them was a little girl up to her chin at the table. She's practicing how to count with the sweet potatoes. She stands there on a chair, pointing at each sweet potato. "One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight. . . Nine, Ten. . . El-ev-en, Twe-lve. . ."

Then Nannie showed the kids the Hope Buss, which is like a food pantry on wheels. And the kids are sitting in sorority ladies's laps and they are taking pictures, and Nannie Croney turns to me and says, "Pastor Andy, this is community. This is a God moment for me."

Watch for Jesus, when he comes. It takes work and smoothing out the bumps, always. But this Jesus is also, always with us, even to the end of the age. Thanks be to God.