

November 15, 2009 Sermon

SUDDENLY WITHOUT WARNING

Philip K. Buchanan

Let me begin with two short stories.

A young lady busied herself getting ready for a date. It was to be with a man she regarded as 'special'. There would be dinner at an exclusive restaurant. There would be music and dancing. Yes, this was to be a wonderful evening. She went out to have her hair and nails done. She returned home, did her makeup, put on her best dress and was finally ready. His expected arrival time came and went. After an hour, she decided she had been stood up. Sadly, she let down her hair, put on her pajamas, gathered her favorite junk food and sat down before the TV. An hour later there was a knock at the door. It was her date. He looked at her with a surprised expression and said, "What? I gave you two extra hours and you're still not ready!"

An elderly lady – terminally ill – sat on the edge of her bed next to her adult son. She weakly asked, "Am I going to die?" Her son, not known for giving philosophical answers said, "Mom, we're all going to die, we just don't know when." Nothing more was asked nothing more was answered.

It is human nature to want to 'know things' even when we are completely helpless to alter their outcome. Or, as in the young lady's circumstances, she had been prepared but lost faith, decided it wasn't going to happen, and gave up.

In today's Gospel, Peter, James, John and Andrew wanted to know when the end was coming. Jesus both warned the disciples not to be misled by false prophets nor be frightened of the signs of the apocalypse. But Jesus did not, could not, answer **when** the world as we know it would end. That would be solely God's will. Not even His own son knew.

The disciples could not envision the temple with its mega-tons of stone being destroyed suddenly, without warning. Could that happen today? Could it happen with all the detection devices and all the early warning systems our technology provides?

In 1963, shots rang out in Dallas, suddenly, without warning, and a president of the United States died.

In 2001, September 11th, jet passenger planes were hijacked, suddenly, without warning, as more than three-thousand persons entered the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The day after Christmas 2004: The place: the tropical islands surrounding the Indian Ocean. Bright sunshine, crowded beaches, people shopping, working, playing, just relaxing. Suddenly, without warning, a tsunami with waves up to 50 feet high came crashing ashore washing inland for miles. 120,000 souls perished.

Friday, February 13, of this year, Continental Connection flight 3407 crashed on approach to Buffalo-Niagara Airport killing 50 suddenly, without warning.

Less than two weeks ago, four young people from Clarence died in a high-speed car crash. And, a physician opened fire in a crowded deployment center at Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 and wounding scores of others. Both incidents came suddenly, without warning.

Just 20 years ago who could have envisioned what the Internet is today. This is the Information Age. You need not go to the library. Forget the home encyclopedia, thesaurus, and dictionary. Use the Internet. The up-to-date information at a key click away is staggering. However, one question you won't get an answer to there is, When is the Lord coming again? It is as hidden to us in these modern times as it was to those early Christians two-thousand years ago.

Throughout the entire Bible – both Old and New Testaments – prophecy after prophecy has been given that Christ is coming again. Yet, in this age of immediate answers to so many things, many of us find it hard to envision this happening. Wars rage, corruption runs rampant, the Church is under attack. There are earthquakes, hurricanes, and famines. These are signs, Jesus says, of the end times. Yes, these signs occur today but they have been doing so since Biblical times. One thing we do know for sure, TODAY- today we are one day closer than we were yesterday.

Speaking of the Internet, one story circulating there is a recall notice.

The manufacturer of human units is recalling all, regardless of make or year due to a malfunction in the prototype. This defect has been identified as "Sub sequential Internal Non-Morality," more commonly known as SIN. Symptoms include: Loss of direction, Lack of peace and joy, Selfish behavior, Depression & Fearfulness. The Manufacturer, who is not liable, is offering factory-authorized repair. And his chief technician, his son, has most generously offered to pay all costs. The SIN defect will be replaced with such things as Love, Joy, Peace, and Faithfulness. There's a warning. Human units not responding to this recall action will have to be scrapped in the furnace. The SIN defect will not be permitted to enter Heaven. Signed – GOD, The Manufacturer **P.S.** Contact God any time via 'Kneel mail'.

The end-times as described in the bible certainly will be dramatic. Yet, without a date, without a time, we tend to back-burner our thinking about or preparing for His coming. How would I change my life? How would you change yours? Would the material things, those creature comforts hold such importance? Would we make peace with our enemies? Would we treat differently all with whom we come in contact? How would we change our lives? Would we beg forgiveness for our transgressions?

Scripture tells us that when the end does come there will be no prior announcement. The elderly lady knew, or at least suspected, her life was near an end. She had time to make her peace with God. What if we don't have that warning? It may not be judgment day or even as dramatic as a tidal wave or plane crash; it could be a heart attack or stroke. It comes just as suddenly, without warning all the same. What if we hadn't taken time to get ready? It would be too late! If unprepared, with sins not forgiven, the Bible says we'll not be lifted up.

Now for the good news: Thanks to this gift of life we do have time to prepare, if we do it now. Each of us here is familiar with the writings of St. John, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Ask and it shall be granted through your faith. Never lose faith as did that young lady waiting for her date.

You've heard the story about the Buzzard, the Bat, and the Bumblebee?

A buzzard in a 6 x 8 pen with an open top is unable to fly away because it requires a run of 10 to 12 feet to get airborne.

A bat placed on a flat surface can only flop around helplessly. It needs an elevated perch from which to throw itself into the air.

Drop a bumblebee into an open drinking glass. It will only buzz around trying to escape through the sides.

In many ways we are like the buzzard, bat and bumblebee. We struggle about with our problems and frustrations never realizing that all we have to do is look up!

An old saying, "Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, but faith looks up." Look up and seek God's forgiveness of our sins given through his son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Then we'll be prepared for anything that happens suddenly, without warning. Amen

Inspiration and quotes taken from writings by:

St. Mark 13:1-8, St. John 1 1:9, Holy Bible NAS

Tim Meyer, Pastor, Redeemer ELCA, Norton, Kansas

Antonio Torrence, Pastor, Cross of Life Lutheran Church, Plainfield, NJ

Ben F. Corley, Pastor, Fairdale Church of God, Fairdale, KY

Eli Dorman, Pastor Fairhope UMC, Louisville, OH

Aubrey Vaughan, Pastor, Countesthrope Baptist Chapel, Leicestershire, UK