

“Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. . . .” (Hebrews 3:13)

For some people, at least, August is a month we could describe as the ‘calm before the storm.’ There’s precious little time at the end of July and the beginning of August between summer sports and the beginning of fall sports. Teachers ready their materials before the start of the school year, and families take vacations while they can. Farmers eagerly hope for good weather and conditions before the weeks of harvest begin in earnest. August is usually the month of hot and humid weather, time for ‘frantic’ relaxation (if I can say it that way), and eager preparation. It’s the calm before the storm.

It’s that last activity – eager preparation – that I want to focus on a bit. When we know that the ‘storm’ of busy-ness is coming, we want to take every chance we have to find some downtime. Whether that’s sleeping in later than we would during the school year, heading out of town for a getaway, or taking a little more time in the easy chair, this is the time to do it. Of course, it’s good that we take the time that we have to recharge and relax. If we don’t, we’ll run ourselves ragged and burn out. There’s the flipside, though, when we find ourselves caught off guard when the calendar turns. Maybe we lost sight of what was coming and, when fall activities begin, we find ourselves unprepared.

You may imagine where I’m going with this. Jesus often warned his disciples to be ready. One of his most powerful warnings came in connection with the Parable of the Ten Maidens. All ten went to celebrate the arrival of the bridegroom at the wedding feast, but he was delayed. So, they had to wait. But, when the announcement came that he was arriving, only five had enough oil to trim their lamps. The other five had to go and buy some from the market. By the time they returned, the door to the feast was shut and locked. Despite their cries – *Lord, lord, open to us!* – the master of the feast responded, *Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.* In explaining the point, Jesus said, *Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour* (Matthew 25:11-13).

Watch. Be ready. We’re constantly tempted to let our guards down, to be lax, to assume that we have more time. The pandemic – as evil as it is for so many other reasons – has also made this reality worse for us. When the pandemic arrived, there was so much uncertainty. Before much was known about it, before the wide availability of masks, before the rollout of vaccines, we were all extremely cautious. The reality of those early months, though, has continued for many. It’s become easier simply to not get up to worship on Sunday morning. It’s easier not to get together to learn the Bible than it is to come to Sunday school or Bible study. It’s more comfortable to stay away than it is to be together.

Certainly, there are lingering effects that are no less real than the physical realities of the sickness itself. Even for those who haven’t gotten sick, there are mental burdens – anxiety, depression, fear, etc. – that are real and need to be addressed. That needs space for its own conversation. It’s the apathy, the indifference, the put-it-off-till-later attitude, though, that needs attention here. The truth is, *we know neither the day nor the hour.* Jesus has come and died for your sins. He’s risen from the dead for your life. He’s ascended into heaven so that we might receive the Holy Spirit. And he *will* come again to judge the living and the dead. What will his response be to us if we say we weren’t ready?

Today is the day. Don’t put off being ready. Repent of your sins. Come to worship. Hear the Word. Receive Jesus’ body and blood for your forgiveness life and salvation. I encourage you, like Paul, that *working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.* *For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

-Pastor Squire

“Watch! Let not the wicked world with its lies defeat you, lest with bold deceptions hurled it betray and cheat you. Watch and see, lest there be faithless friends to charm you, who but seek to harm you.”

(“Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray”, *LSB 663*, v. 3)