

Text: II Timothy 4:1-5

Theme: Ready or Not, Here I Come!

October 1, 2017

Whether we admit it or not, hide-and-seek was a game most of us played as kids. In fact, some of us still play the game for the sake of our kids or grandkids. We all remember that after the counter finished counting, or sometimes using the 1-2-skip a few method, he or she would call out, "Ready or not; here I come!" In today's text, Christ Himself says essentially the same thing as He calls us to be ready in season and out of season. On this LWML Sunday, we focus on how to get ready for Christ's return.

I. It's clear that God wants us to be ready for His return. A. However, we often lack the eagerness to remain ready. 1. We lack eagerness because we're surrounded by itching ears. Itching ears are people who want to go against the flow, who want to be different just because they can. They want to stir the pot or call it black when everyone else calls it white just to be different. For them, it's entertaining, but for the rest of us, it's dangerous. Itching ears create distractions, diversions; they derail us from our primary focus. With their enticing ideas, our eagerness wanes and being ready in season and out of season takes a back seat to their next enticing idea.

2. We lack eagerness because people don't always want to listen. 2017 is the year of the Reformation, the 500th anniversary of that momentous event. Five hundred years ago, people didn't want to listen to Luther's encouragement to return to the Scriptures. Instead, they followed their itching ears and believed that buying a piece of paper to forgive sins was a better idea. Even today, Paul's words ring true, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine." We've arrived. Actually, we arrived there many years ago and it just keeps getting worse. Because people don't always want to listen, we lose our zeal to speak when we need to speak.

3. We lack eagerness because we sometimes forget that we are called to proclaim. If we don't speak, who will? If we don't tell the simple message even our kids know, "Jesus loves me this I know," who else will? And if that message goes silent, God's Church will go silent and His primary purpose and plan will become non-existent. It's so easy to say, "Not me. That's her job, not my job." But God isn't interested in whose job it is or isn't in our minds. Paul writes to us, "Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season." For our eagerness to continue, we need to remind ourselves that getting the message out is the greatest task God has ever given to us.

B. Since Christ reminds us of His return, how do we get ready? 1. We get ready by stepping out. What event was unfolding in the church in 1517? Some would say, "Who cares what was happening five hundred years ago! All that matters is now!" But now is what it is because someone stepped out five hundred years ago, because someone was ready in season and out of season to stand on the truth. As we have heard before, "Unless we learn from history, history will repeat itself." Luther stepped out because someone needed to step out. Today, someone needs to step out, to stand on the truth before there's no truth to stand on.

2. Add to those thoughts another event. What was occurring in our country in 1942? We were in the midst of World War II. At a time when it looked like stepping out was a bad idea, the LWML stepped out and became an entity of the church, an

entity that has provided over 100 million dollars to global missions since its inception during that unsettling era in our country. Because they stepped out, God used them to encourage women to serve the Lord with gladness when gladness wasn't waiting on their doorstep each morning. With the increasing unrest in our world, our country, we, too, need to step out in order to be ready when Christ returns.

3. We get ready by realizing that the season is now. Paul writes, "Be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction." If we wait for the perfect moment, we will still be waiting when Christ returns. Martin Luther realized that the time is now as he said, "Here I stand. I can do no other so help me God." The LWML, while our country was in the midst of war, realized that now was the time to encourage women to serve. We don't need an event; we simply need a heart that says, "Now is my time to speak, to serve, to encourage because this is the moment God has given me!"

4. We get ready by realizing that we have been sent by God. Paul writes, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... I give you this charge." Luther believed God had given him the task of reforming the church. The LWML, as a newly founded organization, believed that their God-given task was to empower women for service in the church as they spread the Word. Today, God stands quietly before you as He says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Will you go for Me? Will you take the task I give you gladly?" Whatever your name, your age, your title, you, too, have been sent by God so that you and others will be ready for His return.

5. We get ready by believing God will bless. "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge the duties of your ministry." And God could have easily led Paul to pen these words, "and I will bless your labors done in My name." If God didn't intend to bless Luther as he took his stand for the truth, would He have sent him on his mission? If He never intended to bless the work of the LWML, would He have planted the idea in the first place? God intends for your words, your actions, your caring heart to reach others with the love of Christ, and His promise to you and to me is, "I will bless your efforts."

6. We get ready by preaching and teaching. The slogan is out there and perhaps is worthy of adopting as it says, "Just do it!" Young Pastor Timothy could have listened intently and ignored Paul's words of wisdom. Luther could have never spoke out and watched the church come to ruin. The LWML could have said, "Now is not a good time," and never become one of the most dynamic entities of our Synod today. But they didn't. The lesson from each of them for us seems clear, doesn't it? Now is the time. There is no better time than the present. Someone needs to speak. Someone needs to act because someone out there needs Jesus now.

7. So what else can we do than to adopt that simple statement, "Just do it!" into our lives, because ready or not, He will come! Amen.