

Luke 12:35-46 12/1/13 (Red Letters #11) LETTERS OF WARNING

A priest and a pastor from the local churches are standing by the side of the road, pounding a sign into the ground that reads: “The End is Near! Turn Around Now – Before it’s too Late!

As a car sped past them, the driver yelled, “Leave us alone, you religious nuts!” From behind the bend they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

The pastor turns to the priest and asks, “Do you think the sign should just say ‘Bridge Out?’”

Well, priests and pastors do give warnings, don’t we? And more and more we **are** being considered religious nuts, right up there with those who walk around with the sandwich boards saying, “The End is Near.”

Slide: - Homer “End is Near” pic

And you know, I don’t really enjoy being called a “religious nut” or any other name for that matter. So why do we do it? Why do we bother to give warnings? Well, isn’t it true that generally speaking people give warnings to people in order to protect them from some real danger? Young people especially... your parents give you warnings, don’t they? Well, they don’t warn you because they’re killjoys. Their main goal in life is not to keep you from having fun. But they do want to protect you, so yes, they sometimes restrict where you can go and what you can do – for your own good. And Jesus does the same thing. So I’ve got four points I want to make about Jesus’ Red Letters of Warning and why we need them – even during the season of Advent.

Slide: 1. We need warnings because we don’t realize the dangers we face.

Right Karl?

A few years back our family went to Letchworth State Park in New York, the Grand Canyon of the East. Beautiful gorge and waterfalls, hiking trails, I’d highly recommend it for a vacation. And Karl told us he went there too as a youngster.

Slide: Railroad bridge pic

Now, do you see the railroad bridge is this picture? That bridge was built in 1875 and looks like it. It is 820 feet long and 240 feet high, and believe it or not, it is still in use today – although not for long. It is scheduled to be torn down after a new bridge is built. I love the description of one of the articles I read about it:

Slide: “The bridge, near a beautiful waterfall, has served as a centerpiece for photographers and as a magnet for daredevil teens, who've historically defied warnings from authorities to stay away from the bridge.”

Now, I don’t know if most of you have pictured Karl as a daredevil teen, but you know, all of us have a little bit of that in us, and on one particular day, he had way too much. And up on the bridge he went to sightsee and to throw off a few paper airplanes to see how long they would fly. You have to admit, that would be pretty cool... but sure enough, along came the train. They tried to run back, but couldn’t make it. And all of those terrifying scenes from the movies played themselves out for real, as they hung tight against a thin cable that was all that kept them from a 240 foot drop. He remembers that it was a “looooooonngggg train!” But somehow they hung on. A week later a woman and her son didn’t make it and were knocked of the bridge and killed.

Now, Karl claims that he never saw a warning sign, so our family took this picture at the top of the bridge:

Slide: Hoyer pic by warning sign

Of course there was a bent up piece of fence a little farther on where I suppose a determined teen could slip through.

But folks, can you imagine what it must have felt like? To be on that bridge, the wind of the train trying to suck you off a thin cable, holding on for all you're worth, the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness? Some of you can, though not maybe with that particular experience. And of course, the fact is that there are people all around you every day who live in that feeling 24/7. They're not sure where they came from or how they got there or where they're going. They don't realize the dangers that they face if they keep on that path. They need literally, to be saved. And we have the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. And we also have the message of what happens when people reject Christ, and that means that we have a calling to warn people just as Jesus warned them.

And so we get to the "Letters of Warning" this morning on this, the 1st Sunday in Advent. The season of Advent for many has become really a pre-Christmas season as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus once again. And that certainly is a big part of Advent. Advent means "coming" and that coming first of Jesus changed everything. But the church created the Advent season to celebrate a **3-fold coming** of Christ: 1) His humble coming in the flesh, 2) His spiritual coming into the hearts of men, and 3) His return for judgment, called the final coming. This year we will look at all of those aspects of Advent through the words of Christ - His Red Letters of Warning, of Faith, Hope and love; letters of humility, of life and salvation.

One of the things that surprised me a little bit about this Warning section of the Red Letters, was that there were more in it by far than any other category. Jesus says...

Slide: "Watch out for false prophets." (Mt. 7:15 NIV)

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Mt. 6:5 NIV)

"Watch out that no one deceives you." (Mt. 24:4 NIV)

But most of His warnings were about His Second coming, His final coming, when He will bring an end to all things and create a new heaven a new earth, the home of righteousness. And so He says:

Slide: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (Mt. 24:42 NIV)

Again

Slide: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Mt. 25:13 NIV)

"You also must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Luke 12:40 NIV)

And many more. So, if you don't like warnings, I'd say take it up with Jesus. The first two readings, and really all of Matthew 24 & 25 are all about warning us that He is coming again and quite simply, that many people won't be ready. He says,

Slide: "37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:37-39 NIV)

And of course there's more there than just the warning, isn't there? One of the things those red letters tell us is that Jesus absolutely believed the Genesis account was true, and that a world-wide flood killed every living creature on earth, except those in the ark with Noah and his

family. And so He's saying, just as Noah warned you, I am warning you. It's not going to be water this time. It's going to be fire. And He asks us:

Slide: 45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? **46** It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.” (Matthew 24:45–46 NIV)

So He calls us servants, and He wants us to be taking care of His household when He returns. Are we faithful and wise? Are we ready? At any given moment in your life, would you like to be found doing what you're doing when Jesus comes again? One of the many sayings I've accumulated over time is this one:

Slide: “Never undertake anything for which you wouldn't have the courage to ask the blessing of heaven.” G. C. Lichtenbert

And of course, all of us should understand that we have undertaken many things that wouldn't qualify. Nevertheless, in God's grace, Jesus came into our world, lived and died for us. And He rose again to place us into His kingdom. And if we're going to be faithful servants in charge of His household that means we take care of His creation, being good stewards of the land and the seas, and it means that we take care for every soul in every person on the face of the earth. So as the representatives of Jesus, we must warn people as He warned them.

Again, we need warnings because 1. We don't realize the dangers we face, and

Slide: 2. Because we do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.

One of the Red Letters we didn't read was when Peter had made his great confession of faith in Jesus and declared: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” (Matthew 16: 16) But when Jesus began to explain in great detail what was going to happen to him: “**that he must ...suffer many things... and be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**” Peter showed that he really didn't understand what the Christ had come to do. He took Jesus aside and said:

“Never, Lord... This shall never happen to you!” And Jesus had to take Peter aside and say:

Slide: “**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**” (Matthew 16:23 NIV)

He was thinking of an earthly kingdom and Jesus wanted His kingdom to come in each one of us as we put our trust in Him. And of course, we run into the same problem. We tend to fix our eyes on what is seen instead of what is unseen, and we fall into the trap of putting our minds on what the rest of the world thinks about, instead of what God wants us to think about. Black Friday instead of Good Friday. Stuff instead of Him.

Slide: Black Friday pic

Then to be honest, Sometimes we need warnings

Slide: 3. Because we get drowsy.

In the second reading this morning, Jesus talked about the kingdom of heaven being like lampholders going out to meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones didn't take any extra oil for their lamps and the bridegroom was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. They didn't make the right preparations. And so often we don't either. We saw it for instance, in Jesus' **red letters** of stewardship, when we're rich toward ourselves, but not rich toward God...when we put off a closer walk with Jesus... when we literally worship St. Mattress instead of joining our brothers and sisters in Christ as He commanded us...

And folks, in that reading did you catch one of the most frightening phrases in the Bible?

Slide: “**And the door was shut.**” (Matthew 25:10 NIV)

In other words, when Jesus comes again, it will be too late for those who have been sleeping. All those Left Behind books that gave the impression of people getting a second chance when Jesus comes again are simply wrong. Folks, in this life, we often by the Grace of God, have second chances and third chances and fourth chances, we are given many chances to repent, to turn from our ways and follow Jesus. But when He comes again, those chances are over. Hence the warning now. And again, these warnings aren't coming from some “religious nut”. They're coming from Jesus Christ, who loves you and gave Himself up on the cross to pay the price for your sins and pave the way to your eternity in heaven. Here, he is simply saying, “Pay attention.” You know, I find it interesting that the exclamation point has become a universal symbol for warning.

Slide: Exclamation point pic

In print, it's there to get people to pay attention, to wake up if you've been drowsy and try to realize there is something very important here that you're going to miss if you're not careful.

Then finally, in the last reading we find that we need a warning from Jesus...

Slide: 4. Because we'd rather be masters than servants.

In the last reading today Jesus says:

Slide: “**45 But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.**”

(Luke 12:45–46 NIV)

Folks, let me ask you a question: Did your image of Jesus include Him saying something like this: “**The master will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.**”? But Jesus is clearly saying that is what will happen when servants start to act like masters, and bad masters at that. By the way, He's saying that of the servants of the master... In our context, people who are part of the Church, who say they are part of God's household. He's telling you and me how serious this job is that He has given us: this Advent warning. Yes, for a time, our Savior was the Little Lord Jesus, and it's right to celebrate that time and rejoice that God so loved the World that He gave His one and only Son. But as we do, pay attention, and get ready. Because He's not the “little Lord Jesus” anymore. He is the one who has “all authority in heaven and on earth”. He is the one to whom 10,000 times 10,000 sing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever.” Amen.

Lord, thank You for Your Word today to wake us up. We need it. In so many ways we've been sleeping instead of getting ready for Your coming. Forgive us. Help us to heed Your Red Letters of warning today. Give us the courage to also warn others and give us the comfort of knowing that you are coming as our friend and Savior. Amen.