

The Rev. John Sampson, Pastor
Glen Ridge Congregational Church
Sunday, November 30, 2025
“It’s the End of the World As We Know It”



“Deluge” by Frederick Hart

Matthew 24:36 - 44

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, in case you didn't hear, we're in Advent. Advent is a season of journey when day by day, week by week, we move inexorably forward towards Bethlehem, to that manger, and to the birth of Jesus, the one we will come to call the Christ. It is a journey that does not give us instantaneous gratification but slowly like the birth of a child grows over time. And we, God's children, God's people need to be patient.

This journey may feel like it is a journey of our own making. Think about when we talk about making a journey. We decide when we will get in our car or when we will take that first step. We often like to think about journeys as being under our control. And it seems to us a real problem when they get out of our control. When we miss the train. When the hotel doesn't have that reservation we were sure we made. When we didn't make our connecting flight. But in this journey of Advent, it is actually God who is making the first step.

God looks down into our lives and into the life of the world and sees a great darkness. Sees a people living in darkness. This is the darkest part of the year just physically. The days are

shorter, the days are colder, there is not as much sunlight. In an overwrought cliché, there is another darkness that we can see when we open up the morning paper. Think about the people of Sri Lanka this morning. Think about the gun shootings that have occurred across this country this week. Look closer to home and there may be other kinds of darkness that we see in our relationships or within ourselves, things which need God's help and love to be healed.

And so, in this season of Advent, into this darkness of our world, of our nation, of ourselves, God takes the first step and sets into motion the great story of redemption, which is the basis of our faith. Because those promises that God has made so long ago are about to come true. Not just in the past, not just 2,000 years ago in a small village on the edge of empire, but even today, even in our lives and even in the life of this world.

This seems like good news, doesn't it? Seems like hopeful news.

And yet, the story we hear today is the story of the flood. Not one of the Bible's happiest stories. I would venture the reason why we hear the story of the flood today is because God reminds us to make space for what is about to be born. We need space and we need to release the things that crowd our hearts and our lives to make that space.

Water, the basis of the story of the flood, can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, it can be a frightening force. For any of us who have dealt with flooding, it's scary. There's no escape from the destruction of water. Think of the people of Sri Lanka who are sitting on the tops of their houses. It reminded me of the pictures of Katrina in New Orleans just a number of years ago.

But water also has the ability to cleanse and heal and bring life and renewal. The water that God promises us today looks like a flood and looks like a destruction for those of us who may be holding on too tightly to the way things are to the inertia of our lives, to the way in which we're just going through the motions of our lives asleep or half awake.

But to those of us who look out over our world and hope and pray that something better could be on the horizon, that the world as we know it is not the way that the world should be, that our hearts and our relationships aren't the way we wish they would be. For us, we hope for a water that can cleanse and renew and bring life to that which has seemed dead.

I call it water. The story of the flood calls it water. But the story of Advent calls this force of change, a child. That child's name is Jesus, the one we will call the Christ. Born on the edge of an empire to two no-name peasants. With nothing to recommend himself. He will be God's agent of change in the world and in our lives. He will be the one to come to all of us who say this world isn't what it should be. There's too much violence and war, too much heartbreak and apathy.

This child will come and show us a different way and will save us from the hopelessness that can creep into all of our lives. How do you see this child? Do you see this child with trepidation, with fear? The fear that this child will ask too much of you, that you hold on to the inertia of your lives with too much grasping. Or do you look at the birth and the promise of the birth of this child as the possibility of something new, of setting the world right, of setting our hearts right? It all depends on where we stand who this child will be for us.

And we don't have to wait long because Christmas is almost here.

Amen.