**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“What is Your Evacuation Plan?”**

Rev. David K. Groth

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“*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?” (2 Peter 3:11).*

If ever there was a disaster approaching your home, and you had to evacuate, what would you take?

Millions of Floridians face that decision whenever a hurricane bears down on their state. Out west last year, raging wildfires also caused mass evacuations, and many families had little notice. They were forced to grab and go. If it were you, and you had, say, ten minutes tops, what would you choose?

Obviously, loved ones make the cut. For many, that includes their pets. Important documents such as passports and Social Security cards. Other pricey possessions, such as jewelry, and any cash in the house. Maybe four days’ worth of clothing? What about laptops and chargers? Your Bible? If you have kids, what would they be allowed to bring? By now the car is nearly full, but what about sentimental items, photographs of family members, artwork?

Under pressure, people make mistakes. They grab grandma’s wedding dress but forget their necessary medications.

Now, not too many hurricanes or wildfires have harassed us in Watertown. Eventually, however, most of us will have to decide what to take and what to let go. This happens in the aging process as circumstances compel us to downsize multiple times.

I remember visiting my grandfather shortly after his last move into the nursing home. Over the decades, he had done well for himself and his family, but obviously, there were restrictions on what could be brought into his room: a couple of things to hang on the walls, something for the top of his dresser, a few changes of clothes, and not much more. He sat in his recliner in his usual posture and with a sweep of his hand, he surveyed his room and said, “So this is what it amounts to.” All those years of working and saving and accumulating followed by one downsize after another, a bell curve of income and possessions acquired, and then used up or otherwise let go. The nursing home was the right place for him at that time, an expression of God’s continued care for him. But nursing homes have a way of eating up a person’s life’s savings. And then, when grandpa’s body was finally placed in a coffin, it was, of course, without a wallet, credit cards or cell phone. 1 Timothy 6, “For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

Our text today reminds us we are short-lived, mortal beings, and everything we possess is also temporal, destructible. We need this reminder because sometimes we live as if life will go on forever, that we’ll be able to maintain the status quo. We don’t like to think about our mortality. This morning, however, Isaiah pushed our noses into it - our own mortality. “All flesh is grass [just grass] and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass” (Is. 40:6).

The Epistle reminds us that not just our bodies, but this earth and everything you and I own, will one day be destroyed. Verse 10, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed . . . all these things will be dissolved.” Dissolved, meaning so broken down it disappears altogether. This includes everything dear to you: your house, your pictures, and keepsakes: all gone. Dissolved.

In verse 11, Peter asks the obvious: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?” Surely it would be foolhardy to pretend we’ll live forever on this earth. It would be equally foolhardy to pretend our goods will also be durable and retain their value and usefulness. So how are we to live knowing it will all be dissolved? Peter says we should live lives of holiness. Verse 14, “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for [the day of the Lord], be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.” Stuff doesn’t give us peace; it comes only with Jesus.

Have you ever been through the home of a hoarder? Most of it has little value, but it’s all precious to the hoarder, and the hoarder isn’t just faking it either. There’s a strong emotional attachment, and the belief that he or she will one day need those things. The truth is, however, when the hoarder eventually loses control of the decisions, soon after, there will be a big dumpster parked in front of the house and most of the contents will go where they should have gone long before.

I think that’s how the Lord looks at your stuff . . . and mine. There’s nothing here of real value. In a world that will one day be dissolved, it makes no sense to allow our hearts to get all wrapped up in stuff. Jesus warns us, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk. 12:15). He also said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 34). Therefore, Paul says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:1-2).

The danger is that we forget everything we have belongs to God; He lends it to us for a brief time. The danger is that the created becomes more important to us than the Creator. The danger is that our grip on stuff becomes stronger than our grip on the Christians faith. The danger is we love our possessions and income more than we do our Redeemer, and that’s called idolatry.

Another definition of idolatry is that which you would never give up is your god. Conversely, when we give it away, if only the emotional ownership we have on stuff, we are only hastening the inevitable. We are only doing for ourselves what death will eventually do for us anyway.

 Think of Job and his faithfulness. He lost it all. Everything was taken from him. All his wealth: his oxen and herds and camels. His servants and shepherds, his sons and daughters . . . everything. What does Job do? Chapter 1:20, “He fell on the ground and worshipped God saying, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And then verse 22, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” It was all taken away, and in response, Job worshipped God.

In our text, Peter says the world and all our stuff will one day be dissolved. In the Greek, the word dissolve is a derivative of the same word to loose or loosen, as in “Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 18:18). This means not just our stuff is dissolved with the coming of the Lord. Our sin is also dissolved . . . by the blood of Christ! It disappears. His blood is like the strongest detergent lifting and dissolving the most stubborn of stains on us, to be white as snow, Isaiah says. That is, Jesus forgives us also for our messed-up calculations of what is precious and what is not. Jesus died for all the misallocated emotional attachments that we put on stuff. And again, it was not with silver or gold that He redeemed us (that wouldn’t be of any help when it comes to forgiving our sin), but only with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18).

Your grip on some things you own is too strong. But thanks be to God the Lord’s grip on you is stronger still. You probably have some stuff that you love too much. The Lord Jesus loves you more. He promised, “No one will snatch you out of My hand” (Jn. 10:28). If not even the devil with his strength can pry us from the Lord’s hand, certainly inanimate objects won’t be able to do that either!

One last thing. The government suggests everyone have an evacuation plan, even in places like Watertown in case of a chemical spill or threat of explosion. If you do compose a list of things to take, leave grandma’s wedding dress off of it. She’ll understand. And know that God has you on His own evacuation plan. This world is dangerous. He doesn’t want us living in a broken and lawless world, any more than you would want to see your children living in a broken and lawless neighborhood. Therefore, one day, (and soon, I hope), He’s going to return and get us out. He’s going to evacuate us to a safe place, a place where there are no disasters (either natural or man-made).

There’s no need to be afraid of that day. When you see Him coming, Jesus said, “Stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” When He comes, don’t even think about taking anything along. Where you are going, you have no need of anything. He provides it all . . . the finest room and board (He calls it a mansion, right?), and a feast with the best of meats and the finest of wines, a party, a never-ending praise. You’ll not need anything that you’ve left behind, neither will you want it or miss it. That’s a promise. His promise. The grass will wither, and the flowers will fade, but the Word of the LORD (His promise) stands forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.