

August 7 2022 sermon manuscript

Title: Two Minute Warning

1 Peter 4:7-11

7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

In football, there's a thing call the Two-Minute Warning. It's an automatic time out gives both teams the opportunity to pause, regroup, and make plan to give their maximum effort. The speed, energy, and intensity of the players goes up – as does the excitement.

As Peter begins to bring his letter to a close, he issues something of a “two minute warning” to his churches by saying, “The end of all things is near.” It is important for us to remember – two millenia later – that the early church saw Christ's return as imminent. They were a bit disoriented by the fact that some of their members had died of old age before he came back. Peter knows that it can be hard to maintain a sense of urgency – especially under the slow steady grind of persecution and hardship – if people can't see that the finish line.

We here at West Valley certainly know what that is like! It makes me queasy to think of all the times I've said something that implied that our Transition work was almost complete. It's hard to call for a “big push at the end” only to find out we aren't at the end yet after. It can feel a bit like giving our all during the two minute warning only to find we are going into overtime. It's easy to get tired and lose heart.

When there is a risk of that happening, we have to come back to basics. We have to focus on the fundamentals of shared life together. Doing the simple things, we can keep moving forward.

Core

Living as though “the end of all things is near” requires a clear mind, an open heart, and a strong body.

A Clear Mind

Verse 7: “... [B]e serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.

Peter calls on believers to be alert and vigilant so that they can pray effectively. The times called for spiritual awareness. If it was true then, it is certainly true now.

We need clear, undistracted minds in order to grow in our capacity for discernment that, is being able to distinguish one thing from another and see things for what they truly are.

I could preach a sermon every Sunday about eliminated distractions and every Sunday you would nod your head and every Sunday I would feel personal conviction about it. There are just so many things to distract ourselves with! But effective prayer is the greatest power a believer has. Turning off the TV, putting your phone in a different part of the house, and just sitting in silence for 20 minutes can be a powerful way to start noticing and stop reacting. That is the beginning of discernment.

An Open Heart

Verse 8: “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.”

In verses 8 – 10, Peter is putting a strong emphasis on reciprocity. The “one another”-ness of the Christian life cannot be overstated as far as the New Testament is concerned. From Jesus’ direction that “they will know you are my disciples by the way you love one another” (John 13:35) onward, the church leaders knew that the greatest witness Christians would have before a watching world would be their love and open-heartedness toward each other.

Keeping our hearts open is hard. It is really hard. It is not our natural inclination. Our natural inclination is to close down, protect, shield our hearts from the possibility of being disappointed, rejected or even betrayed. Keeping one’s heart open is about ginning up warm and fuzzy feelings for others. It’s about a choice. My heart is only open because I choose to open it, and choose to keep it open. Does that open me up to pain. It most certainly does. So I have to remember that pain and suffering are places where my heart is open and I am actually alive... not sleepwalking through life.

Under the pressure of persecution, it is very tempting to close our hearts to the people closest to us. It is tempting just like it is tempting for football players to start blaming each other if they are losing the game when the two minute warning comes. But it is at this moment when turning toward each other, keeping hearts open to each other, and maintaining that posture at all costs is so important. Do we let each other down? Sure we do. But Peter says that the remedy to all manner of failures and disappointments is constant, mutual love. It “covers a multitude of sins.”

A Strong Body

Verse 9: “Be hospitable to one another without complaining.”

When I speak of “a strong body” here I’m not really thinking about physical fitness, though that is definitely important. I’ve learned that physical activity has been really important for me in terms in having a clear mind and an open heart.

But when Peter urges us to be hospitable, I am thinking of how he is essentially saying, “Get up and do something for someone else. Use your body in the service of helping others.”

Hospitality was a critically important value in the world of the first century. And we can imagine that these new Christians were experiencing “hospitality fatigue.” After all, they were now not only called upon to practice hospitality with their biological families, but now with their new and growing church family as well. This was clearly a challenge for all churches, since we know that the author of Hebrews has a similar call:

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

And so I am also thinking about how West Valley’s leaders have recently recommitted to getting up and getting together and doing stuff! Line dancing stuff and after church brunch stuff! Give someone a ride to church stuff and bring coffee and donuts stuff!

What this adds up to:

When we do this...

Verse 10: We are able to be good stewards of what God has given to each of us.

A steward was called upon to manage the resources of the household for the best benefit of all the household’s members. Verses 8-10 is all about reciprocity... that is, we are called to be good stewards of our lives not just for our sakes but for the sake of everyone around us.

I need to maintain a clear mind, an open heart and a strong body for your sake, and I need you to do likewise for my sake.

The net result is:

Verse 11: Our speaking and our serving glorify God in all things through Jesus Christ.

Or as Paul would put it: We are the Body of Christ, being Jesus to each other for the sake of the world.

Serving should be done with clear recognition that God is the ultimate source of power. Using spiritual gifts is not merely human work, but God energized work. This is like how Paul tells the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

All gifts should be used with the end in mind to glorify God, so Peter ends this section with a doxology.

Call

Consider how you are stewarding your life – your relationships, your words, your efforts – in a way that builds up the church and glorifies God.

We get to practice this even now as we share in the Lord's Supper together.