

Mark 13:24-37
“Stay Awake for the Coming of the Lord”
First Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Jesus said: ***“Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake”*** (Mark 13:35-37).

Some years ago, a tourist was traveling along the shores of Lake Como in Northern Italy. He wanted to visit especially one castle called Villa Arconti. Now, when the tourist reached the castle, a friendly old gardener opened the gate and showed him the grounds, which this old man kept in perfect order.

“How long have you been here?” the tourist asked. *“Twenty-four years,”* replied the gardener.

“And how often has the owner of the castle been here during that time?”

“Four times.”

“When was he here the last time?” *“Twelve-years ago.”*

“Never since then?” *“Never.”*

“Does he write to you?” *“No.”*

“From whom then do you get your instructions?” *“From his agent in Milan.”*

“Does this agent come out here quite often?” *“Never.”*

“Who, then, comes here?” *“I am almost always alone – only once in a great while a tourist comes here.”*

“But you keep this garden in such fine condition and take such excellent care of all the plants, just as though you expected your master to come tomorrow.”

“Today, sir, today,” the old gardener promptly replied.

[Be Prepared]

Today we begin a new church year and a new season, Advent. Now, Advent literally means “coming,” so during this season, we celebrate the Lord’s first coming, which began at His conception in the virgin Mary’s womb through the Holy Spirit and ended with His bodily ascension into heaven, where He is to this day, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. We also anticipate Christ’s second coming, when He will come to judge the living and the dead, which could be at any moment – and not just during the season of Advent.

So, how is your faith this day? Are you prepared to meet our Master Jesus, like the gardener is prepared to meet his master, the owner of the castle? How prepared are you?

In our Gospel text from Mark this morning, Jesus teaches and reassures us – *His flock* – on how to be ready for His second Advent, His second coming. Christ teaches us: ***“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.... Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake”*** (Mark 13:32-33, 35-37).

Here, Christ is warning His flock to stay awake until His coming. Now, Jesus is not telling us to never rest our eyes and sleep, for we all need a good night’s rest in order to stay awake and function in our daily lives. Rather, Jesus is warning us to remain alert to proclaim the Gospel and practice the one true Christian faith in our daily life – our daily vocations: father, mother, son, daughter, teacher, student, boss, employee, and on and on.

What Christ is saying is this: ***“Be on guard! Be alert!”*** He is teaching that we should not immerse ourselves in the things of this world and thus lose our own soul. He is teaching us to not be an easy-going Christian whose conversation and conduct are hardly distinguishable from unbelievers. He is teaching that we must always keep our eyes fixed and focused on Him alone.

As God’s children, we wait with patient watchfulness. And why are we patient? We are patient because our Savior has planted a bright and certain hope in our hearts.

Upon hearing the Boy Scout motto: “Be Prepared,” someone asked Scouting founder Robert Baden-Powell in 1907¹ the inevitable question: “Prepared for what?” “Why for any old thing,” he replied. He then went on to say, “Being prepared means you are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty.”

This is exactly what Jesus is teaching us today since the Christian is never off duty. We are not just a Christian on a Sunday morning, we are a Christian day and night, night and day, 24-7. We are always to remain vigilant and prepared for the Lord’s coming.

[How Prepared is Christ?]

But, what about Jesus? Is He prepared for His own bodily return? For He says, ***“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”*** (Mark 13:32).

Is it true that Jesus does not even know when He will come to judge the living and dead? Well, pay attention to when He said this. He spoke this prior to His atoning death and resurrection. So, when He spoke these words, He was in the state of humiliation. Remember, since before time existed, Jesus has always been God. But, when He came into the world in human form, He willingly gave up much of His divine attributes – His divine powers – during His earthly ministry, although when necessary, He used His divine powers to bring people to faith in Him, such as turning water into wine and healing the sick.

The Apostle Paul explains Christ’s humiliation this way: ***“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross”*** (Philippians 2:5-8).

So, as Christ said, ***“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father,”*** here He is speaking this from His state of humiliation. But what about today? Does Christ, in fact, know when He will return? That answer is “Yes!”

¹ <https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2017/05/08/be-prepared-scout-motto-origin/>

Now that Christ has risen from the dead and has bodily ascended into heaven, He is now in the state of exultation. So, after His saving work was complete, He resumed the full and constant use of the divine powers that he had voluntarily limited Himself while He was in His state of humiliation.

This is a lot to comprehend. Here's how the Apostle Paul explains Christ's state of exultation: ***“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*** (Philippians 2:9-11).

So, since Christ is at the state of exaltation, He is all-knowing. He knows what God the Father knows. He knows what the Holy Spirit knows. For they are three-in-one and one-in-three as one God, now and forever. As Paul says in Colossians 2:3, ***“In [Him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”***

So, Christ is prepared. He knows the day and the hour. But, since we are not all-knowing, like Him, we are to always be prepared. We are to always be awake!

Now Jesus does give us some hints, but we may not always take notice of these hints. He says: ***“But in those days, after the tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling down from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory”*** (Mark 13:24-26).

Will you be prepared for that day? For if you prepare then, it will be too late as Christ teaches us in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Remember, some of the virgins were foolish, the others were wise. The wise were prepared, but the foolish were not. For that, the foolish were left out of the marriage feast. The foolish ones knocked on the door to the wedding feast and pleaded, ***“Lord, lord, open to us.”*** But He answered, ***“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”***

So, will you be known by the Lord at His coming?

[My Words Will Not Pass Away]

One way to be known by the Lord at His coming is trusting in His words as He says, ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”*** (Mark 13:31).

You see, the world and sun, moon and stars may go into complete chaos, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. These words of Jesus are written before us in the Old and New Testaments from Genesis to Revelation. These are Christ's very words. These are the words that will never pass away. These are the words that give us a certain hope in uncertain times.

As we begin the season of Advent and a new church year, this is a time of repentance and renewal.

Each December, we begin seeing commercials for fitness gyms with great offers to get us back into physical shape for the new year. Many of us may make New Years' resolutions to be better at this or that.

But, what about the Christian new year? Are you satisfied with the shape of your Christian faith?

How often do we really take to heart the words of Christ that will never pass away? Are you lackadaisical in your faith in Christ? If Christ returns today or tomorrow, would you be scared and shocked, or would you be at calm?

Do you fear God's wrath by avoiding every sin? Is your love for and trust in God evident in your daily living? Do you neglect the Word of God? Do you gossip, listen to rumors, or take pleasure in talking about the faults or mistakes of anyone?

Throughout His Written Word, Christ constantly teaches His flock to ***"Stay awake."*** He says: ***"Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven"*** (Matthew 5:19) and ***"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void"*** (Luke 16:17).

We can all do better in displaying the love of Christ, since none of us is perfect. We can all strive to become better Christians by becoming more like Christ by doing our best in following His commandments.

Now, we seemingly always mess up, but do not let that become an excuse. The point is to be ready and not to think of excuses. Instead, we are to repent of that sin, receive God's forgiveness, and strive to do our best in being a follower of Christ.

Thanks be to the Triune God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that He gives us time to be ready as we hear His Word and receive His Sacrament. The best news of all is that when all else passes away, Christ’s sure words remain, in which we hope and trust.

The words that we will hear at Christ’s Second Coming – His Second Advent – will fulfill the Gospel as Jesus acknowledges those who, through faith worked by the Holy Spirit, acknowledged Him as their Lord.

We will hear words proclaiming Jesus as the One who came *“to give His life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). We will hear words that uphold God’s holy and perfect law, but also announce that through the perfect life of Jesus on our behalf, He has fulfilled all of God’s demands. We will hear words of forgiveness assured for us by the cross and empty tomb. These words will cover us in the righteousness of Jesus for all eternity, for we have been declared righteous for His sake.

For us now, we stay awake for the coming of the Lord as He readies us through His Word and Sacrament.

Now, the purpose of Christ’s second coming is not merely to judge but, primarily, to give us the salvation He won for us during His first Advent on earth. This He accomplished through His sinless life, His atoning suffering and death and His bodily resurrection from the dead. In fact, Christ gives of His forgiveness this day in His Word and Sacrament!

So, always look to Jesus and His cross where He won for all of mankind forgiveness, life, and salvation! This is why He came! This is why He will come again! In the meantime, we trust in Him and His promises by keeping our eyes fixed and focused on Jesus alone as we love God and support our neighbor by staying awake for the coming of the Lord! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠