

Written Copy: Mark 13:32-37 “Stay Awake in Faith”

1st Sunday in Advent

Sunday, November 29th, 2020

Text: Mark 13: 32-37

³² "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ 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---³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

Exegetical Statement

In Mark Chapter 13 Jesus has been telling the Disciples the things that must occur between His resurrection/ascension and His return on the Last Day. He tells them not to give them an agenda or specific plan/timetable in order to discern what day that Last Day might be, but that they might be prepared and ever watchful for His coming. When the days of persecution and suffering that we are living in now draw to a close there will come about great cosmic signs and upheavals: the sun and moon will be darkened, the stars (planets, solar system, galaxies) will be removed from their secure footing and disappear, along with all that is reality to us as we know it. Replacing these things will be the Christ return in the power and glory that are His as God the Son. He will send His angels out and gather all the elect, those who were left alive on the Last Day, as well as those whose souls have been with Him in heaven. These believers will be resurrected body and soul and gathered to Him as He creates the new heaven and earth and places us upon it. We will not know the century, year, day, or hour of His return, but as we see all the things He described that will happen they should be signs of hope and joy, just as the tender branches and sprouting leaves of the fig tree signal summertime and the appearance of figs. While all of creation will pass away the Word and promises of Jesus shall remain for eternity. Therefore we are to trust in His words and promises. We, as the Church not to just sit and stare skyward, or focus our attention on worldly things and away from our call to the Church and so let our faith fall away. We are to remain watchful and vigilant in our faith relationship with Christ by fulfilling all that He has given us as the Church to do in our vocations. We are to do the work of the Church while believing and confessing His sure and certain return at any time, and our job of building up each other in faith and sharing the Gospel that adds to the number of the elect who will be called to Christ on that Last Day.

Focus Statement:

We are the elect that Christ has called into His Church. His Word and promise is that we have been made ready for eternity through our faith in His death and resurrection. As we do the work He has gifted us to do in our vocations, He is at work to strengthen us and keep us in faith. He reminds us that His return marks our resurrection to eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

COVID-19 and all the suffering associated with it, health wise and economic threatened to turn our attention away from Christ and His promised return. We look for a fix and restoration of this world at the expense of our vigilantly watching for the end and His return

What the hearer should do as a result:

As we go about our lives, instead of doing nothing but staring skyward, or working to set this world right, which it will never be, we do the work of the Church with one eye on His return. We focus on what will best prepare all people for that day which is sharing the Gospel of faith and working to keep one another in faith.

Subject Sentence: Awake in Faith Working as the Church

Introduction: Losing Track of Time

Do you ever get so wrapped up in something that you lose all track of time? If what you are wrapped up in is beneficial to you, then that's not a bad thing. When I go for my IV antibiotic infusion in the morning it takes about an hour for it to be done. They have a TV on in the room, but that isn't always the best way to occupy my time. At that time of morning during the week the channel they have on is usually showing repeats of NCIS-Los Angeles followed by the original NCIS with Leroy Jethro Gibbs. Both of those are entertaining, except for the commercials. They are intolerable. It's actually more like we watch the commercials which are broken up with short segments of NCIS. And on the weekend, it's the Hallmark Channel which right now is showing non-stop sappy Christmas movies. And they are all the same, just different characters and slightly different plots. Now I know some of you like those movies, and to you I apologize for picking on them. And even those are better than what was on one morning: an infomercial for some health care plan, for one straight hour! Time actually stopped for me that morning. That infusion lasted for days it seems.

But when you're doing something that you enjoy, and even better something that is beneficial, then time flies by. It would be enjoyable if they had Netflix instead of cable at the infusion clinic so we could watch NCIS without commercials. But if that was the case, I would be watching that to the exclusion of what I usually use that time for: my morning devotion. My time with Jesus. I read through a passage of Scripture, meditate on what it was saying to those it was written to, as well as what it is saying to me. That makes my time at infusion very beneficial to my faith relationship. And when I am wrapped up in God's Word my infusion time is done before you know it.

The only problem is that TV can be a distraction. I find myself drawn in to watching NCIS. During the commercials I can tune the TV out. But when the show starts back up, and especially when it gets to an exciting part, my attention is drawn back to the TV and I forget what I was meditating on. Time passes quickly, but not to my benefit. The TV draws my attention away from what is most beneficial to me, hearing from and speaking to my Savior. Time passes with NCIS on the TV, but I sometimes leave my infusion feeling I spent my morning focused on the wrong thing.

Why Jesus' Calls us to Remain Awake

How easy is it for you to become distracted in your spiritual relationship with Jesus? Is that something you and I need to be concerned about? We have plenty of time before we meet Jesus on the Last Day, don't we? **Mark 13:32-33** ³² **"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."** Jesus is not telling us "Don't take a nap. Don't close your eyes and fall asleep" That would be physically impossible. Instead He is telling us as Christians to remain focused on Him and our relationship with Him. Remain focused on the work that He has for us to do. Why? Because that day the day of His return is coming, and we will not know when that is.

Earlier in Mark Chapter 13 Jesus gives to us and His disciples a list of what He says must happen between now and that day when He returns. And we find this list expounded on in the Book of Revelation. There will be wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and other natural disasters increasing in strength and severity. There will be famines and plagues, things like COVID-19, and perhaps worse to come before the world ends. Christians will be persecuted for their faith. The love mankind has for his fellow man will grow cold. Charity will disappear as the world focuses on self-preservation. Ponder these things for a moment. These are not future signs. This is the world that you and I live in now. And it will get worse. Truly everything is in place. Jesus could return tomorrow, or today, or right at this moment. And if He did would He find you awake spiritually? Or asleep?

But why is this a problem for us? Aren't we all baptized Christians who are sealed in our faith? Yes. But Jesus is speaking to us, the Church in this Lesson and is warning us we can become distracted in our faith relationship with Him. How? By focusing, worrying, and fearing all the things that are going on in the world right now. By being so worried about contracting COVID-19 that the fear replaces faith. So worried and caught up in the troubles that surround us that instead of turning to Him in prayer we turn away. So busy with our life in this world that we have no time for studying His Word, hearing His voice in worship, being fed by Him in His Sacrament, to speaking to Him in prayer. We often see other things as more pressing, but how much more important is your faith relationship with Jesus?

We cannot and will not know when the Last Day will be. But when that final day does come, this world is in store for a catastrophe that is beyond what we can even imagine. **Mark 13:24-25** ²⁴ **"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.** In **Revelation 6:12-17** the Apostle John paints this word picture of what that time will be like from the point of view of the lost. ¹² **When he [Jesus] opened the sixth seal [of the scroll that symbolizes the express will of God for all that must happen between Christ's ascension and resurrection], I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its**

winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” The sky will roll up like a scroll and mountains and Islands will be removed from their places. This is something that is beyond our ability to comprehend. It is the dissolution and destruction of all that we regard as reality: the very universe and the powers that hold it in place will be shaken and removed. And the lost will try to run and hide in fear, and there will be no place for them to hide. The wrath is God’s anger over all the sins that unbelievers refused Jesus’ offer in the Gospel to cover. Now it will all fall upon them, all the sins they have ever committed.

Do you think in all these things anyone is going to have the presence of mind to turn to Jesus? Will they have presence of mind or the time to seek out their Christian neighbor and say, “I’m ready now! Tell me about Jesus! I’m sorry I never listened before.” But no one can turn to Jesus on their own. Only His Spirit has the power to call unbelievers to faith through the Gospel. But by this time it’s too late. **Mark 13:26-27** ²⁶ **And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.** ²⁷ **And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.** For those who are not one of the elect, as well as those who have let their faith relationship with Jesus fade away, there will be no time to repent and turn to faith. They will be eternally lost.

The Glorious Last Day for the Elect

But what about you and I? What about you who are here because you were called into a faith relationship with Christ at your baptism? You to whom the Spirit has impressed upon your heart that there is nothing more important right now than hearing and meditating on your Savior’s Words and returning thanks and praise to Him? You to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the depth of the grace and love that comes from Jesus Christ? You who believe that on the cross Jesus took all the wrath that should be your lot because of your sin and died to take it away? You who confess and believe that He did that out of the greatest love that there is, the love He has for you? You, who hold by faith that just as Jesus rose again from death never to die again you will also rise and live forever with Him? What will that day be like for you?

It will be joyous beyond belief. Seeing that Son of Man, who is the Son of God, our Savior returning to earth means that you and I are done with these broken bodies of sickness and death. They will be replaced with glorified bodies. And our hearts, which up until that time continued to desire to disobey our loving God, will be purged from that sinfulness. We will become what we've never been before: completely sinless, pure in body and soul. We will be remade body and soul to become perfect, just as our Lord and Savior is. No longer sinner/saints, but saints thru and thru. Jesus will make us ready to live in His new heaven and new earth that He will remake before our eyes from the ashes of this fallen world. And we will live forever with each other and in the bodily glorified presence of our Savior, living out eternity in His love.

How We Remain Awake in Faith

That's not something you want to miss, is it? That's why Jesus tells us in **Mark 13:33** "**Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.**" But how do we do that? How do we remain on guard, observant and vigilant in our faith?

Jesus gives us a short illustration in **Mark 13:34** **It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.** Jesus is the man, the owner of the house that has ascended back to the Father. We are His servants, His slaves, whom He has put in charge to do the work of His household, the church. He has given and empowered each of us to do a portion of this work, each of us according to our vocations, talents, skills and abilities. Each of us according to our spiritual gifts. And what is this work He has given us to do? There are many things, but they can be summarized in this command: Build up one another in the faith and share that faith with the lost. That is the job of the Church in a nutshell. Remain in faith and share that faith. Remain in faith by studying His Word and participating in the Sacraments, so that with faith built up and strengthened by the Holy Spirit you can share that faith with those around you. As we go about doing this work the Holy Spirit remains at work in you, empowering you, creating and sustaining faith in all who hear the Gospel. It is He who does the work of keeping your life of faith alive and keeping you awake in Christ Jesus. He is at work in you right now, making sure that when Jesus returns, even if it be today, you are awake and ready for Him. You are doing the work He left for you to do, always with the thought that today could be that day when He returns.

Conclusion

When I go to my infusion, I can spend that hour watching TV and be entertained. I could bring some earphones and watch Netflix on my phone and be entertained and pass the whole hour very quickly. But knowing what the future holds, what will happen on the Last Day, is that the best way to spend my time? I can watch Leroy Jethro Gibbs and NCIS in the comfort of my own home when I relax in the evening. But I've found it's more beneficial to set aside time first thing focused on my relationship with Jesus, letting Him speak to me, and letting His Spirit guide me in meditation. Letting Him do the work of keeping me awake in the faith. And His work within me paid off one morning as the gentleman sitting next to me at infusion saw me reading the Bible and started asking me questions. It led to a conversation about the personal troubles He was going through. I was able to share my faith with him, and he let me pray with Him. Because the day of Jesus return could be any day, even that day, that was time well spent that morning. And that was more needful than watching TV any day.

Jesus calls you and I to be vigilant, to remain awake in our faith, and be watchful regarding His coming again. Not that we should sit back and watch the skies. But that we engage in the work of the Church personally and corporately, always remembering that this day might be the day of His return. Amen