

Written Copy: Mark 13:32-37 “Act on What You Can Be Certain Of”

Last Sunday of the Church Year-Proper 29

Sunday, November 24th, 2024

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."

The text's intent

To describe events beyond our comprehension of what will happen when the Last Day comes, and Jesus returns in all His glory as the cosmic powers become unglued and reality as we know it ceases to exist. Provide the promise that our Savior will send out His angels to assemble all those chosen by Him and sealed in repentant faith by the Holy Spirit to be raised and glorified for life everlasting. He shares these things so that we know that when they come this is all part of the Father's plan. Yet they are not a timeline to count down to the day, just signs that confirm our faith in His 2nd coming on a day and hour known only by the Father. As we the Church wait, we remain faithfully expecting that day could be anytime and therefore work to remain awake in faith by doing the work given the Church: building one another up in repentant faith and sharing the Gospel with the lost. Our focus should not be on things that will not survive His 2nd coming, but upon what will, our eternal souls and those around us He sends for us to witness law and Gospel to.

Focus Statement:

Even though we will not know the day or hour we can be certain that He will return in all His glory one particular day, which could be tomorrow. Just as He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of His first Advent, these things He says must happen are also being fulfilled (though not in their entirety). He has done all that is necessary to make us ready for life everlasting through His atoning sacrifice for all mankind. And He has given that gracious gift to you in the Gospel proclamation which includes baptism. His Spirit is at work to keep us sealed in repentant faith by which we are kept ready for our entrance into the Church Triumphant through our death and His return on the Last Day

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Since we cannot be certain of the day or hour of His return, we waste time in speculating on the when (is it now?). Or we are lulled into inactivity or misdirected activity thinking there is plenty of time and the day is far off. In our desire to please our sinful hearts and the world we fall asleep to the truth of Law and Gospel. We therefore fail to do the work He has given us as His Church.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Certain of His return and our being ever prepared in repentant faith we are to go about the work given to the Church and each of us as members: building one another up in the faith, protecting one another from falling asleep in unbelief, and sharing the Gospel by word and deed. We work on building His kingdom and not our own. We work with the urgency that today could be the day He returns, or we join the Church Triumphant.

Subject Sentence: Certain of His coming by, do the work of the Church

Introduction: Preparing For Birth of Child

As I meditated on our Gospel Reading and what our Lord was saying to us here today, I found this suggestion given by one of my Seminary Professors concerning this passage to be a helpful introduction. He said to think of Jesus' sure and certain coming like preparing for the birth of a child. As I think back on our preparation for the birth of my oldest child, Samantha, I could see this made sense. There were things we were certain about, and other things that we were uncertain of that we had to leave in the hands of the Lord.

As they saying goes, 'while the only things that are certain are death and taxes', we were fairly certain that this child would one day be born. While she should be born sometime near the 9th month of pregnancy, there was no guarantee that she wouldn't come sooner or later. Now we could've investigated all kinds of factors that might've helped us figure it out, such as hereditary factors-how long was Susan's mother pregnant with her, or study the average pregnancy length for women of Susan's age, or how the weight of the child and her development in the womb might contribute, we didn't. None of these could give us a reliable day, time, or hour. The baby would come when the Lord decided it was time for her to be born.

Instead of trying to figure out what was beyond us, we decided to do the work that was in our hands to do. Given that a baby was coming, we could and did get the house ready for her arrival, painting the room that would be the nursery, buying the right crib, and filling out what we needed in the way of baby supplies and clothes on the baby shower wish list. That was wise, because when the time came for her to be born it was a surprise to both of us. Labor started in the wee hours of the morning and continued on for far too long. When the baby went into distress, and the doctor ascertained that a natural birth would be dangerous for baby and mommy, we had to wait for them to prep for a C-Section. That meant suffering through contractions that were not going to bring the baby into this world. That was a very rough time indeed for both of us. Yet in the end, a healthy baby girl was welcomed into the world.

The Uncertainty Surrounding Christ's Return

As we consider Jesus' Second Coming on the Last Day there are many things we are uncertain about. The biggest thing is when will that day be? In the last several months as people have been worrying about the possibility of World War III, the election being a sign of the end times, and the possibility that the anti-Christ is making himself known, many people within and outside of the Church were asking me if I thought the Last Day was near. They would cite the fulfillment of many of the signs of the end times from Scripture with the wars and rumors of wars, the increase of natural disasters, and even the reports of UFOs as all being harbingers of the end. My response was a firm and certain, "I don't know".

We do know that as we get closer to the Last Day the world will become more evil and mankind's hearts will grow cold toward one another. There will be a figure Scripture refers to as the "anti-Christ" who will claim the authority of God Himself on earth and demand the worship and praise due only to the Lord. And the world will turn in persecution against the Church. The problem is throughout various times in history people have looked around at the state of the world and were certain these signs were being fulfilled and the end was now, only to be proved wrong as the days kept on coming and the earth kept on spinning. Luther in his day thought the Pope was the incarnation of the anti-Christ. At the end of World War II as the allies learned of the horrors of the Holocaust people thought this signaled the end of the world. The same was true during the peak of the Cold War in the 1950's - 1970's as people thought the time was nigh for the final battle between good and evil, that Armageddon, was upon them.

Whenever we are tempted to look at what is going on around us and formulate our own timeline to the day of Jesus return it is good to recall what He Himself has said about that day. **Mark 13:32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** No one is going to figure out any timeline. And as far as the signs being fulfilled Jesus tells us in **Mark 13:30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.** Even here in this verse there is uncertainty as the word the ESV translates as "generation" can also be translated as "race"-meaning humanity. And in regard to '*all these things taking place*', a clearer translation of this verse would be to say, '*until all these things begin to happen*'. And all the things Jesus has warned us about have begun to happen, at least in part, but not yet in full.

On the other hand, since history keeps playing itself out, and while Jesus has told us, "**Behold, I am coming soon**", it seems like forever so far. This uncertainty can serve to move Christians to fall asleep in their faith. Our sinful hearts are attracted by the ways and cares of the world. To live as a believer in Christ means a spiritual battle every day with how the world lives, how our sinful heart wants to join in with the ways of the world, versus what God's Word tells us is God's desires and expectations for our life. Our sinful selfish heart wants to be pleased and placated, and the world tells us "**Go ahead and do that**".

The devil is speaking his tempting words through the voice of the world. But not just there, he is speaking through the voice of certain denominations who no longer faithfully teach and preach what the God's Word declares to be sinful: cohabitation, same sex marriage, transgenderism. Our Epistle Reading from Jude warns of these things. **Jude 1:17-19** ¹⁷ **But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ¹⁸ **They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."** ¹⁹ **It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.** Jude foretells the division we see within the Church today because of those who claim to speak for God but do not and cannot because they do not have the Spirit of God. These are people from within the Church who support and encourage Christians to follow the world and please your sinful heart, and mock those who say that is wrong.

Mark 13:37 **And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.**" Jesus gives us this command for a good reason. His return will be as a thief in the night, when no one is expecting, not even us, so you can't be certain. In a similar way none of us can be certain when our last day on earth will be. Therefore, it is dangerous to 'fall asleep in the faith' by trying to figure out what no man can be certain of, or by assuming Christ's return is so far off that we can indulge ourselves and repent of it later. We as the Church can be lulled into disregarding the necessity to remain in Bible Study and participate in Word and Sacrament Worship. We can be lulled into falling asleep in our faith.

What We Can Be Certain About Regarding Christ's Return

What can we be certain about? That just as Jesus fulfilled all the prophetic word in His first coming as a baby, He will one day fulfill His promised coming again on the Last Day. We can be certain that there will be one day in the future, called the Last Day, because following that day there will be no more days left for us in this current heaven and earth. All that we know of as reality will cease to exist. And all will see the King of Kings and Lord of Lords returning in all His glory as the Divine Son of God.

While we can't be certain of when that will be, or the day of our death, we can and should be certain that the Lord knows when each of those days will be. And He has done everything necessary to make you ready for them. The Father sent the Son with this very mission: to accomplish all that was needed to save every person who ever lived from being lost in eternal destruction. God the Son became the Son of Man so that He could be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. **John 3:16** **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** Who did God love? Who did Jesus come for? The whole world, every person that ever lived no matter how evil they were. He came and took their sins to the cross and died for them so that no man, woman, or child should ever perish, but might enjoy eternal life with Him in the New Heavens and New Earth.

You can and should be certain that He was the atoning sacrifice for you. In your baptism He sent His Spirit to deliver the fruits of His atoning sacrifice to you personally. Whenever the Gospel Message of Jesus' death and resurrection is preached the Holy Spirit is present to confirm in your ears and upon your heart that He died and rose again **for you!** He wants you to be sure and certain that whenever your last day on earth is, your future will be with Him and all believers in eternal life to come, not because of what you have done, but because of everything He has done for you and given to you by faith. And His Spirit is at work through the preaching and teaching of God's Word and through your participation in the Sacrament to keep you awake and steadfast in repentant faith unto life everlasting.

Christ Has Given Us Sure and Certain Marching Orders

So then, how should we live out our lives in the midst of what is certain and what is not? Jesus gives to us the Church and to each of us as individual believers His marching orders. **Mark 13:33-34** 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.**

The servants do not know when the master will return, only that he will be back. He will return when they least expect it. This means there will be no time to slack off, and then do a mad cleaning and chore completing before he returns. They need to keep on doing all that the master expects to keep up his house, while keeping one eye out for his return.

What should this mean for the Church? Don't waste your time trying to figure out a date and time you won't be able to. Don't allow yourself to be lulled into the sleep of unbelief by the desires of your sinful heart encouraged by the voice of the devil speaking through the world. Be engaged in the work He has given to us as His Church of building one another up in the faith and sharing that faith with those around us.

In order to build one another up in the faith first you must work with the Spirit to build up your faith and knowledge of what God commands of you, how you fail to meet His command, and all that Christ has done to forgive you. The more you learn about what God has to say about how to live as a Christian, the more sure and certain your faith becomes. The Holy Spirit is at work in you whenever you read and study His Word and participate in the Sacraments. And you are the Spirit's tool to build up your fellow Christians whenever you participate in small group Bible Study, and worship together, partaking of the Sacrament together with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

With our faith built up the Spirit prepares us to share that faith with those lost souls around us, as well as those who are hurting and doubting. Because we don't know when the end will come there should be a sense of urgency to our ministry to others. Jesus wants them to enjoy eternal life just as badly as He wants you to. He wants us to invite family, friends, and neighbors to join us here. A good occasion might be the special worship services coming up on Thanksgiving Eve, Midweek Advent Dinners and Worship, the Children's Christmas program December 8th and the Roller-Skating Party that evening, and of course Christmas Eve Worship.

But He also wants us to look for ways we can go outside these walls as the Church, and as individuals, to reach out to the lost and hurting in our communities. We do that in our ministry at the Franklin Avenue Mission Diner. We can do more of that by being involved in other community activities. We can support the ministry of others to those in need through our tithing and special gifts, like donating toys to help Franklin Avenue's Christmas gift drive. We do all this with one eye ever watchful for Jesus' return when we least expect it.

Conclusion

Being certain of the birth of a child means not wasting time trying to figure out when it will happen, but instead being busy accomplishing all that needs to be done before the baby arrives. Being sure and certain of Jesus return on the Last Day means not wasting time worrying about how close we are to the Last Day. It means being certain that we are living right now in the "Last Days" and have been ever since Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. It means being certain that He has already accomplished all that needs to be done to save you from eternal hell and win for you a place in eternal life. And it means acting on what you can be certain of, doing the work Christ has called us to do: building up one another in faith and sharing that faith with those around us. And it means that as we do these things, we can know for certain that the Holy Spirit is at work to keep us in steadfast repentant faith unto life everlasting. Amen.