

Mark 13:24-37
"Stay Awake"
Last Sunday of the Church Year

November 25, 2018
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]

Since Jesus bodily ascended into heaven, many people have claimed that they were the second coming of Christ.

One such person who claimed he was Jesus was Arnold Potter. Potter claimed the spirit of Jesus entered into his body and he became the Son of the Living God.

One day Potter even attempted to ascend into heaven by jumping off a cliff. He never ascended, but fell off the cliff to his death on April 2, 1872.

He and countless others have claimed to be the second coming of the Messiah.

But, how would we know when Christ returns?

Believe me, everyone will know when Christ returns. There will be no question. There will be no doubts. He will not return in secret.

"Lo! He comes with clouds descending!"

When Christ returns from the clouds, everyone will know in heaven and on earth.

This is how the Son of Man – Jesus the Christ – will make His triumphal return to earth.

But, before Christ returns with great power and glory to judge the living and the dead, Christians are to rise to arms wielding God's Word while remaining steadfast in the Savior's might.

This is why Jesus says, "***Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come***" (Mark 13:33).

[Tribulation]

Prior to the Lord's second coming, there will be tribulation. We know there will be tribulation, because Jesus says so. In last week's gospel lesson, Jesus said there will be false teachers leading many astray, there will be wars and rumors of wars, there will be much conflict between nations, kingdoms and families, and that we – as followers of Christ – will be hated by all for His name's sake (Mark 13:3-13).

Now, this doesn't sound like the best of news, but Jesus gives us comfort before we get to today's gospel lesson when He says: ***“But the one who endures to the end will be saved”*** (Mark 13:13b).

Even when life looks to be rough, Jesus gives us comfort. Today, Jesus continues where He left off reminding us to “stay awake.”

[Be Ready]

What Jesus is telling us is to always be ready for His second coming.

He could descend from the clouds in seconds, minutes, days or years. We don't know. In fact, Jesus doesn't even know.

Jesus tells 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”*** (Mark 13:32-33).

[Watchman and Servants]

As we wait for Christ, we are to live and act similar to a night watchman. You see, the watchman has to be prepared for anything. And, as much as he may want to rest his eyes, he can't. Even if he believes nothing will ever happen, but he always has to think that something could happen, because he has sworn to protect and defend the business.

Like a watchman, we too should always be prepared for Christ's second coming.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus compares our waiting to servants waiting for their master.

“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. 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 cock crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly to find you asleep” (Mark 13:32-36).

Now, this may sound frightening, but it really isn't. Our role is to be good stewards of what Jesus has given us: His Word and Sacraments.

In His Word, we learn how the Triune God loves us in His Law and in His Gospel. In His Sacraments, we receive His grace.

[Distractions]

In today's world, we may find ourselves distracted with worldly ideals. We tend to focus more on what's happening in Washington, D.C. or in St. Paul more than on what our real focus should be: Christ's return.

Or, we may find ourselves following the sinful culture, rather than Jesus.

After all, it is easier to relax morality by just following the crowd, because we don't want to be seen as not with the times. Each and every one of us wants to be liked. This is our sinful pride.

Or, you may find yourself tired and beaten for standing up for God's truth and just give up.

But, remember what Jesus said: ***“You will be hated by all for my name's sake”*** (Mark 13:13a).

So, if we are loved by the sinful culture, then there is something wrong. Something is askew. Now, we don't simply live our lives contrary to the sinful culture, we live our lives as a follower of Jesus. We live our lives believing that Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

[Build Up, Stay Awake]

So, how do we live in this way?

Each Christian is to build each other up in our most holy faith. (Jude 20)

We build each other up by being right here in God's house. We are built up as we praise God and receive His forgiveness in the Divine Service. We are built up as we learn with one another at Bible studies. This is what prepares us for Christ's second coming.

We are prepared as we keep ourselves in the love of God. We keep ourselves in God's love as we stay awake in guarding ourselves and others against false teachings that could only lead us away from the love of God and ***"wander off into myths"*** (2 Timothy 4:4).

And when an unbeliever asks you about your hope, we shouldn't keep our hope to ourselves, but proclaim the good news of Christ in order that the Holy Spirit can ***"save others by snatching them out of the fire"*** (Jude 23).

And when we have our doubts, we lift each other up by not criticizing the doubter, but by showing mercy on them and praying with them.

We should always remember that even Christ's apostles doubted that Christ would rise from the dead. We like to look at Thomas, but remember they all hid behind that locked door. It was only Thomas who was out and about.

So, if the apostles doubted, we are in good company.

But, their doubts turned into hope when they saw Jesus risen from the dead.

Later, those same apostles saw Jesus bodily ascend into the clouds (Acts 1:9). Then, two men in white robes stood and said, ***"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him going into heaven"*** (Acts 1:11).

This is what Jesus has promised, for He said, ***"They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory"*** (Mark 13:26).

When Christ returns, this will be a festival day for all Christians, but also a day of turmoil for unbelievers. This is the day of judgement.

This is why Jesus says: ***"What I say to you I also say to all: Stay awake"*** (Mark 13:37).

And so, we are to stay awake. We stay awake, because no matter what turmoil may come our way, we know that our salvation will prevail. Our salvation is found only in Jesus Christ who will judge with equity and truth, righteousness and grace.

For no matter what, the words of Jesus will not pass away. His Words will last longer than all of creation, because His Word is eternal. It never ends.

We know that because Jesus died and rose, as followers of Christ, we too, will be like Him. As followers of Christ, we live in His grace for which He gives us eternal life, salvation and forgiveness of sins.

As followers of Christ, we are presented blameless to God the Father, because we have been wrapped in Christ's righteousness, which makes us perfect.

So, before Christ returns, we stay awake. We stay awake knowing that we have been forgiven. We stay awake knowing that we are loved by God. We stay awake knowing that our salvation will be forever. Amen.

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

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠