

Last Sunday of the Church Year

Text: Mark 13:24-37 (NIV)

²⁴“But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁶“At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. ²⁸“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³²“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Theme: Watch, because You Don’t Know

The night that Jesus was betrayed, He took Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane. He told them to watch and pray. However, they kept falling asleep. The Lord wanted them to watch for those who were coming to arrest Him. He wanted them to pray as He prayed. Because they fell asleep, they were unprepared and surprised when Judas suddenly arrived to betray Jesus. They watched their Lord be taken away, and they all fled in fear.

Throughout this chapter Jesus tells us to watch and pray as we look forward to His second coming. The Greek word for “watch” is “Gregory.” You might say that all of our names are Greg as we watch for the Lord’s coming. He tells us to watch because we don’t know when it will be.

I. Why should we watch for the Lord’s second coming?

The day will come suddenly. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was scolding His disciples for falling asleep. Then it says, “*Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas came.*” Suddenly the Lord’s betrayer was there, standing in front of them all. That is how it will be at the end of the world. Everything will continue on as it has been. Then suddenly Christ will return. Jesus says, “*And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*” On Ascension Day the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven. On the last day He will descend in the same way that He went up into heaven. Only this time no one will miss it. The entire world will see Christ in all of His glory. It will happen in an instant. We want to be ready because there will be no more time to prepare when Christ suddenly returns.

We also want to be ready because no one knows when He will return. Jesus says, “*Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angel in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” Jesus could not be clearer. Yet, so many people throughout the centuries have claimed to know the

day. It would take many books to recount all the false prophecies of Jesus' return. My favorite was a book that was given to every pastor in America the year that I was ordained entitled, "*88 Reasons why Jesus will return in '88.*" This year the rage is that the end will come in 2012 because the Mayan calendar ends that day. (By the way, the calendar on my wall ends on Dec 31. Does that mean that the world will end then?) There are so many people who look at the Bible as a code book that they can crack. Even though Jesus says that no one knows the day, they feel that they have outsmarted God and figured it out. But none of us knows the day. The Lord tells us to watch because the day of His return will be a surprise to us all.

We want to watch, so that the Lord doesn't find us sleeping when He returns. Jesus says, "*Therefore stay awake – lest He come and find you asleep.*" He says that the master gives His servants various tasks. We all have gifts to use for the good of our Lord's church until He returns. But there is one charge that He gives to every Christian. That is to watch. We are all to be like the doorkeeper and watch for the Lord's return. Imagine if the doorkeeper was asleep when the master returns. He would knock and knock to be let into the house, but the doorkeeper is snoozing away. Jesus wants each of us to watch and be ready for the day that He returns. Our faith and hope should be fixed on Him, rather than on the joys and sins of this world. It will be very bad for us if our faith falls asleep before He returns.

II. How do we watch?

We take the signs that Jesus gives to heart. Last week's Gospel lesson gave all kinds of signs: wars and rumors of war, natural disasters, false teaching, persecution, and the spread of the Gospel. Jesus says that these things are like when the leaves begin to sprout on the fig tree. They are signs of the end. That doesn't mean that we can figure out from these signs exactly when the end will be, but they are reminders that heaven and earth will pass away. They remind us that the greatest riches that we have are not of this world. As they grow in intensity, we know that the end is coming nearer.

We watch as we remain in Christ's Word and prayer. Jesus says that His words will never pass away. They are like the oil that keeps our flame of faith alive. The Law in God's Word warns us when we are getting sleepy. It warns us against the things that we should stay away from. It shows us our weaknesses and sins. When we don't take God's law to heart, our faith begins to fall asleep. But the Gospel in God's Word and His Supper are really what keep our faith awake and watchful. They remind us that Christ gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of my sins. They remind us that in baptism our sins were washed away, and we were reborn as children of God. We are His and He is ours, and nothing can ever separate us from His love.

Prayer is also very important. Jesus wants us to listen to Him, but He also wants us to bring our needs, our fears, and our praise to Him in prayer. We also pray that He will return soon. Even though we don't physically see God yet, He invites us to speak with Him in prayer. He even commands us to pray, but He also promises to hear our prayers and answer them for our good.

We watch because we look forward to the day of Jesus' return with great anticipation. Jesus says, "They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the end of the earth to the ends of heaven." We will see Christ with our own eyes. Those who are still alive will suddenly be changed. Those who have died

will rise. We will have glorious bodies. They will be free from all the sin, weakness, and pain that we have on this earth. Then we will hear those glorious words from Jesus, *“Come, You who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”* We cannot begin to image how wonderful that day will be for the Christian. We pray in the Lord’s Prayer, *“For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.”* When Jesus returns, He will give us His kingdom, power and glory forever and ever. The Lord’s second coming is not a day that we Christians should fear at all. It is the great day of our final salvation. It is the day that we look forward to more than anything.

The Lord told the disciples to watch and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. He tells us to do the same thing as we watch for His return. However, there is a great difference between the two. They were to watch for the coming of the Lord’s betrayer, that they would not be caught off guard when Christ would give His life for our redemption. In this world we do that too as we watch for the signs that Jesus gives of the end, that they will not make our faith melt away as happened to the disciples in the Garden.

But we watch and pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” because we are looking forward to the day of the Lord’s return. It will be the greatest day ever. May God keep us watchful and praying for that day, that we may be ready the day that Christ comes to take His Church to be with Him in His glory for all eternity.

Amen.

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