

First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

Mark 13:32-37 (EHV) – ³²“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”

Introduction

Did your parents ever go somewhere and leave you in charge of the house? I’m not talking about running down to the grocery store for a gallon of milk, but for a longer period of time – a day or two or several. Maybe they had to attend a wedding or funeral out of town and for some reason you couldn’t go along. If they did leave you in charge, it means that they can trust you to take care of things and to act responsibly.

When they left, did they tell you when they were coming back? Probably. They wouldn’t want you to worry about them. But what if they didn’t tell you when they’d be back? What if they said, “We’re leaving now. I don’t know when we’ll be back, but we want you to take care of the house while we’re gone. You’ll have to do the shopping and the cleaning. You’ll have to handle any emergencies that come up. If the plumbing needs fixing, you’ll have to deal with it. If there’s a fire, we’re counting on you to get everyone out safely. Make sure the lawn gets mowed and weed the garden and trim the hedges. We don’t want the place to be a disaster when we get home. We might be a few days or it could be several years.” In the beginning, each morning you’d probably get up and wonder if today would be the day. After a while, though, you’d probably not worry about it all that much.

Theme: Your Savior Has Made You a Watchman in His House.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he would no longer be right there with them. Just like our parents sometimes left us in charge of things, Jesus places us in charge of his house – the Church. We’re responsible to take care of it until he returns. **YOUR SAVIOR HAS MADE YOU A WATCHMAN IN HIS HOUSE.** We’ll see, this morning, that your work as watchmen involves two simple things: **Be faithful in his absence. Be alert for his return.**

Part I: Be faithful in his absence.

The majority of our text deals with being alert for Jesus’ return. But we need to be careful not to overlook the other part, which is just as important. Jesus urged his disciples – and he urges us – to be faithful in his absence.

The Word of God before us today is part of the events of Tuesday of Holy Week. In just over 48 hours these twelve students would lose their teacher, their friend, their Lord. During the week, Jesus often taught in the temple, but the majority of his time was spent talking with and instructing his disciples. Such is the case in Mark 13. Mark tells us at the beginning of the section, **“As [Jesus] was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled?’”**

These two sets of brothers were Jesus’ first four disciples, and Peter, James, and John were very special to Jesus. They were privileged to see Jesus transfigured while the other nine had to wait at the foot of the mountain. Only those three were allowed to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus. As he prayed in Gethsemane, Jesus took those three a little farther with him into the garden before praying in private. Paul speaks of those three as pillars of the church who gave him the right hand of fellowship and encouraged him as the missionary to the Gentiles. It shouldn’t surprise us, then, that those three would ask about the last days.

In verses 33 and 34 of the text, Jesus makes it clear that we need to be just as concerned about the *present* day as we do about the *last* days. **“Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch.”**

We’ve already said that the house is God’s church. Jesus himself is the cornerstone and believers are the individual bricks. God’s Word is the cement – the mortar that holds everything together.

Just as the man in Jesus’ illustration goes away on a long journey, Jesus also left his house. The difference is that Jesus only left visibly. He’s still here with us physically and spiritually. How else could he make the promise, **“And surely I am with you always until the end of the age”**? We can’t see Jesus with our own two eyes. We can’t hear his voice, except in the Word he left for us. But we know he’s here. And he’s at his Father’s right hand – the position of power and glory – ruling over the world and his Church for our good.

We’re the servants in the story. Paul tells us in Romans, **“After you were set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”** A few verses later he says that we’re **“slaves to God.”** Jesus bought each one of you with his own precious blood and now you belong to him. But what a wonderful slavery it is! Your new master is love itself. He doesn’t threaten. He doesn’t beat. He protects. He provides. He comforts. As God’s servants, we’re eager to do anything and everything to serve him and his Church.

Even though Jesus is still ruling his Church, he’s given each one of us assigned tasks and responsibilities. To some, he’s given the public ministry. He calls pastors and teachers to be full-time servants. To all, he’s given the command to **“Go and gather disciples.”** That’s what we call the universal priesthood of believers. All of us are priests, able to preach law to the impenitent sinner and gospel to the repentant and forgiven sinner. We all have the same tool: God’s powerful Word. We go forward well-armed and confident that his Word will bear fruit as he sees fit. Don’t take your responsibilities lightly. Especially speaking of called workers, but also of all of God’s servants, Paul says, **“It is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”**

Your tasks are varied. The New Testament often uses the picture of the body to describe our different abilities and jobs. Some of us are eyes. Some are ears. Some are mouths. Some are hands. Some are legs. Some are feet. Each part is different. Each part is necessary. No matter how varied the tasks, the goal is common – **“for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ.”** We’ll nurture those who are already believers so that they may be well-equipped to work in God’s house. We’ll reach out to those who don’t know Christ so that more bricks may be added to the building. That’s my responsibility. That’s your responsibility. And carry it out knowing that your Master is behind you and supporting you until he returns again visibly.

Transition

As the homeowner in the story would someday return, Jesus also tells his servants to keep one eye on the road and both eyes to the sky, alert for his return.

Part II: Be alert for his return.

We’re reminded that no one knows when Judgment Day will come, but once again, Jesus warns us not to be caught napping. Verse 32 of our text may seem to be confusing. **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** Isn’t Jesus omniscient – all knowing – because he’s true God? When Jesus humbled himself to be born as a human being, he gave up the full use of his divine knowledge and power. We can accurately say that Jesus learned things as he grew up. In this case, Jesus chose not to be aware of the time when Judgment Day would come. The angels don’t know. No person knows. Only God the Father knows. The same is true today. People are making all sorts of predictions, but the truth is, no one knows when Judgment Day will come but God.

The one thing we do know is that it will be nighttime. That doesn't mean that it'll be after 6 p.m. and before dawn, but that it will be unexpected and sudden. Each day brings us closer to that Day. **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning."** Are we now in the evening? Is it midnight? Is the rooster about to crow? Is it just about dawn? We don't know, so we need to be prepared at all of those times. If you're the obedient kid, and your parents leave you in charge of the house while they're gone, you'll make sure the laundry is done and folded and the sink isn't full of dirty dishes and there's an inch of dust on the furniture. You won't be trashing the house with parties. Whether they come home at two in the afternoon or two in the morning, you'll be ready for them. That's what our Savior expects of us when he returns in glory with a shout and a trumpet blast and with all the angels with him.

It's so easy to let down your guard, though, isn't it? How can we live each day as if it is the last when it's been almost 2000 years since he told us to **"keep watch"**? So many people out there in the world are napping and nothing seems to be hurting them? Our eyes get heavy with temptation and our bodies get worn out with sin. "It can't hurt to just shut our eyes for a second, can it?" Let Jesus warning jar you to wakefulness. **"If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping."** If he comes on a Sunday morning, will he find you in worship or on the couch skipping out? If he comes when you're online, will you be at a site that honors him? Will he catch you helping someone or trashing a person behind his or her back? Look what happened to the five virgins who slept and then awoke to find out they didn't have any oil. They missed out on the wedding banquet because of their heavy eyelids. That's why we live each day as the last. It's not just unwise to be caught napping. It's fatal.

Jesus words aren't just a warning to our old adam. They're also an encouragement to our new man. As a servant in God's Church, I want to stay awake to see that day. It's like waiting up for New Year's when I was young. No matter how tired I was, I didn't want to fall asleep so I'd miss it. It's like expectant grandparents in the hospital waiting room who can't wait to hear the good news. No one would dare sleep at a time like that even if they could.

Your task – your assignment as God's watchman: **"What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!"** In joy and confidence and out of concern for the lost, rouse those who are daydreaming or dead in sleep. Warn them of the consequences of inattentiveness. Reassure them by speaking of the amazing and wonderful events that will surround Jesus' coming for those who belong to him.

Conclusion

Your Savior has given you an awesome responsibility. He asks that you be faithful in whatever calling you're in to tell the world of him and to prepare them for his return. He's given you all the abilities you need. He's empowered you with his life-giving Word. He's filled you with joy. Serve him with excitement and eagerness while he's absent. Be every ready and eager for his return. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.