

**November 30, 2008**  
**Advent 1**

*"Watching for Jesus' Return"*

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### **MARK 13:33-37**

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*“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It’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. <sup>35</sup> “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. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”*

In this 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark we find Jesus leaving the temple in Jerusalem for the last time before he gives up his life for our sin at the cross. As he leaves the temple area with his disciples, one of them comments on how large the stones of the temple were. Jesus tells them the sad news that some day not one of these massive stones would be left resting on another stone. He was referring to that time in 70 AD when the Romans would conquer Jerusalem and tear down the temple stone by stone.

While Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley and probably in view of the temple, three of his closest disciples Peter, James and John, came to him privately and asked him for signs that would indicate to them when this might be happening. Jesus gave signs that pointed to coming destruction of the temple, and also wove in signs about the end of the world such as wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution in the church, and the love of many growing cold. We see these signs still flashing on and off like neon lights letting us now that Jesus coming in glory is near, very near at hand.

On this last Sunday of November we see the signs that tell us Christmas is coming soon. Lights have gone up in homes, stores are decorated, Christmas music is playing, and the morning paper is filled with ads for special deals on Christmas gifts. Our calendars are full of events related to the Christmas season. This is also the season of Advent- the word means “coming.” We look forward to celebrating Jesus first coming into the world, and we also gather to celebrate his Second Coming which he has so clearly promised us in his Word. This morning we want to talk to you about watching for Jesus’ return by waiting patiently and also working diligently.

#### **Waiting patiently**

Since Jesus seems to delay his Second Coming it is so easy to lose patience and even get discouraged. We have the signs flashing on and off that Jesus is coming soon, but we have no way of actually predicting when this will happen. Jesus tells us, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Some people have a hard time accepting Jesus clear words about not knowing the time of his return. I recall a time in 1976 while we were living in Santa Barbara, the Jehovah Witnesses were selling their homes because they were convinced the end of the world was

coming in 1976. About 15 years ago I received a free book in the mail from a man who has a Christian Radio station out of the Bay Area. The title on the book was 1994. He sincerely believed and promoted that Jesus would return in 1994. He justified setting the year of Jesus' return, because Jesus spoke about not knowing the day or hour, but he never said anything against trying to predict the actual year.

This man should have read these words of Jesus carefully. Jesus said clearly, "Be on guard! Be alert! Because you do not know when that time will come." Jesus even said that he and the angels did not know the time of his return. Jesus was fully human and he so fully set aside his knowledge as God that he did not know the time of his return while he was on this earth. Of course, now that he has returned to glory he knows the exact moment of his return.

Think of what a blessing it is to not know the exact hour, or day, or even year of Jesus' return. That means we have the privilege of waking up every morning and wondering to ourselves if this is the day. This wondering leads us to be more faithful in prayer, more faithful reading of the Bible, and filled with a desire to live our lives for Jesus and for his glory.

I remember talking to a man who fought in WW2. He loved to tell the story of coming home for Christmas to his family in the Bay Area. He told them he would be home for Christmas, but he could not tell them when he was coming. They did not have cell phones in those days. The family waited on Christmas Day, they even started preparing the meal, but their son was not home. Every car that drove by, every noise that came from the outside, made them want to jump up and look out the window. Finally they saw the taxi pull up that brought their son home. That's the kind of watching and waiting that fills our lives every day, as we think to ourselves, "Maybe this will be the day, or the week, or the year that my Jesus comes to take us home." How fitting that this man passed away right before Christ and I was able to preach a sermon for the family with the title, "Home for Christmas."

Jesus calls on us to keep watch the way the servants watch the master's house while he is gone on a trip. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know the when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find your sleeping. What I say to everyone, 'Watch!' There are certain times in life when you do not want to be sleeping because it is simply too dangerous, such as doing guard duty on the field of battle, or driving a car, or sleeping through a final test. This morning we ask ourselves, "How awake am I to the reality that Jesus could come back again today or tomorrow? Or doesn't this thinking factor into my daily living experience?"

This past week people woke up early on Friday morning to get in line to get the best deals in the stores. If only we could see a greater eagerness in Christians or even in ourselves as we anticipate Jesus' return. There was once an article written about the Christian church with the title, "How Do You Stir a Sleeping Giant?" At first you might say, "Very carefully!" The author of the article pointed out that there are hundreds of millions of believers in the Christian church today. The Christian church is like a giant. It is huge. But all too often it is sleeping. One study shows that only 85% of the church's work is carried out by only 15% of the people. How do we wake up a sleeping giant? Jesus has the answer for us this morning.

He calls us to watch for his return, by patiently waiting, living each day and each hour as if he were coming immediately.

Look at who you are dear Christian. You are the Bride of Christ. Jesus has taken you and me when we were unfaithful to him because of sin. He found us when we wanted nothing to do with him. He brought us to himself, then washed us clean, and made us his beautiful bride. He has not told us when the big wedding celebration is coming, but he has already dressed us in the beautiful wedding clothes of his righteousness. He has not told us the time, but he has told us that when that day comes we can lift up our heads and know that our redemption is drawing near.

Several years ago someone sent us a Christmas card which I saved and put into my file. It has these words about Jesus on the front of the card. "He took nothing with him as he left his Father and his home. He put aside the glory and the fellowship He'd known. Every right of Deity He gladly laid all down to walk as man among us and seek a different crown. From the highest heaven He sought the lowly place; He beheld our misery instead of his Father's face. He was despised and rejected and faced the cross alone, but when His work was finished, He triumphantly went home. Now He is with his Father, seated at his side, planning out the wedding day and waiting for his bride." Just think, Jesus is planning our wedding, he is keeping the day a secret, and he asks us to live each day as if he is coming soon.

So, does that mean we pack our suitcases, sit on the street corner, or in our backyard, and wait for him to come? No, there is work to be done!

### **Working diligently**

Listen to what Jesus tells about working diligently as he tells us about the master of the house who assigns specific tasks to his servants before he leaves. "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with an assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch." The servants were given assigned tasks. Your job is to water the plants. Your job is to keep the house clean. Your job is to do the laundry. Your job is to make the meals. This reminds me of the time my dad and mom left the family farm and put it into the hands of my brother Charlie and me, and our hired man who lived with us. We had our tasks to do while dad was gone and he went over them several times so we would be sure to know what to do.

Each of the servants had an assigned task to do. Each servant had his appointed task. The Lord has an agenda for your life. Psalm 139 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before they came to be." Ephesians 2:9-10 says that we are saved by grace through faith and this is a gift of God. It also says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Think of the privilege of waking up each day, doing tasks that the Lord has planned out for you to do, and doing them to bring glory to the name of Jesus, and further his kingdom here on this earth. During this month of November and December members of our WELS churches are hearing about the Year of Jubilee, an opportunity to give extra money to help pay off debts and free up more money for the work of ministry. Even in economic hard times we welcome the privilege to serving the Lord with our lives and also with the money

the Lord gives us.

Do you remember playing hide and seek? If you were the first one caught you closed your eyes, and counted to 50 or some other number as everyone found a place to hide. When you were done counting you shouted out, "Ready or not here I come." Jesus is coming. He says, "Ready or not, here I come." I am ready for him to come and so are you. His precious blood washes us clean. We wear his robe of righteousness. Our hope of being accepted does not depend on how successful I am at living a new life for Jesus. It depends on who he is and how he has lived his life for me. That makes us eager to work diligently not to earn his favor, but simply because of his love and mercy and kindness to us that is unfailing. Watch. Wait. Work! Be alert! Jesus is coming. He is coming soon. Amen.