

Christ the King; November 24, 2024
+ Mark 13:26-37 +
“Keep Watch for Your Coming King”

“Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.

“Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near – at the doors! Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the end 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. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”

When we think of the phrase “the end of the world,” or the word “apocalypse,” our minds may think first of a man with wild hair wearing a sandwich board and waving hand-written pamphlets. This is a bad mistake. When we think of “the end of the world” and “apocalypse,” we had better think first of Jesus Christ.

The Christian who reads the Gospels from start to finish – especially the Gospels of Matthew and Mark – will notice how thoroughly apocalyptic they are, and how thoroughly fixed Jesus is on the end of the world as we know it. Jesus’ focus on the Last Day makes perfect sense: he knows he is the Son of God, who is appointed to judge of all people. And here he is! In the flesh with the people he will one day judge. Because he loves all the people he will judge, because he has come to open up heaven to them, he warns them and encourages them over and over: be ready; keep watch for me, because I am coming back to judge you.

And so, when we hear “the end of the world,” let’s think first of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And let’s listen, statement-by-statement, to what he says in one of many apocalyptic portions of the Gospels, in this case Mark chapter 13:

“Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory.” Jesus is, for now, unseen except through the eyes of faith. That is going to change rapidly and permanently when he returns. In these particular verses, Jesus does not call himself a king. But his majesty – great power and glory – will be seen by all. Power and glory cut two ways. If you are on the side of the one who has them, they are wonderful. If you oppose the one with power and glory, you will be squashed. What Jesus says to you, he says to everyone: Keep watch!

“At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the found winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.” Kerry Livgren was right, at least in one sense, when he wrote these lyrics for the band Kansas: “All we are is dust in the wind.” Jesus knows that. But from eternity

God chose – elected – his own to be gathered and brought back from the wind on the Last Day. As he speaks these words, Jesus is not long from going into the grave himself. After laying down his life on the cross to redeem us from sin and Satan’s power, he will enter the grave dead and came out alive. For that reason, it won’t matter what’s become of your body, how long it’s been gone or what condition it’s in or where it is. Jesus will gather and raise his elect. He will use angels, like the ones that stood in his own tomb and announced his resurrection to the ladies, to gather us to our resurrection. Jesus is the King with power over death. And he will use that power for us and all his chosen. So, “dust in the wind” is not all Jesus’ people are. Keep watch with joy. What Jesus says to you, he says to everyone: Keep watch!

“Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near – at the doors!” “These things” we will see happening are the signs Jesus gives earlier in this chapter. Most of these signs are distressing: wars and their rumors, natural disasters, and persecution for Jesus’ people. On the other hand, there is this heartwarming sign: the gospel of salvation will be preached in all the world. Not one of God’s elect will be left outside of his Holy Church. These signs are all things we see and hear every day. And why would God give signs that are constantly in front of us? What’s the point of signs that are always around us? To remind us always that Jesus is at the door. All these signs have been fulfilled. The leaf is out; the King is at the doors. What Jesus says to you, he says to everyone: Keep watch!

“Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Two things will never pass away: the words of Jesus, and his Church. First: his words. Jesus speaks the words you hear today during Holy Week, just three days before he goes to the cross. There he will say, “It is finished,” words that ring through a cheering heaven and a jeering hell, and ring in our ears with the promise of sins forgiven and life in heaven. Not long before they entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus spoke words predicting his sacrifice and his resurrection. Throughout the Gospels he speaks with the purpose of calling us to faith. As his apostle John wrote, **“These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** Heaven and earth will pass away; Jesus’s saving words never will. And because his words create faith, his generation of believers will never pass away, either. That is the sense in which Jesus uses the word “generation” here. It’s not a group of people born within the same twenty or so years, but a group with something far more important than age in common: Christian faith. It’s the generation that has come alive in their souls with faith, known as the Holy Christian Church. And Jesus promises that not even the gates of Hades will prevail against them. His generation of believers, his Church, will endure to the end of the world. And then they will endure through eternity. His words never pass away, and neither do those his words have brought to faith.

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.” One thing we don’t need to do as we watch for Jesus is to try to figure out when his return will be. Not even Jesus in his humbled state knew when he would come the second time. But now, glorified on heaven’s throne, he does. But we don’t, and neither does anyone else in this world. So instead of spending time speculating about it, or listening to self-styled Bible experts who try to figure out, we ought to busy ourselves with the work Jesus does give here: be alert and pray. A good night’s sleep and a cup of coffee will keep you alert to watch for most things. But it’s our Savior’s gospel that keeps us alert for his return. To be alert for Jesus’ second coming is to focus on his first coming. It is to read the Christmas story and to listen to the story of his perfect life, and to watch him die for our sins and rise to give us life. It is to remember that he came the

first time so that when he comes the second, he'll be coming to raise us and welcome us into heavenly mansions. Be in the Word of God. Remember your baptismal grace. Commune every time you can here, and anytime you like by setting up a time with me. This is how we immerse ourselves in Jesus' loving gospel, and how we stay alert for his return.

Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation, including the most lethal of all: to fall from the saving faith. Your enemy the devil is prowling; the unbelieving world around you wants to pull you from your Savior's side. Inside of your own self lurks an ugly and dangerous sinful nature that wants to kill your faith in Jesus. So pray: dear God, help me overcome every temptation, most of all the one to disbelieve my Savior. As your Spirit has promised to do, use my Savior's gospel to keep my faith alive and strong. Because what Jesus says to me he says to everyone: Watch!

"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. 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. If he comes suddenly, do not him find you sleeping." The final words are repetition: stay awake and not asleep. You and I may repeat ourselves needlessly or forgetfully. The Son of God does not. When he repeats himself, it's because what he's saying is life and death. Stay in his gospel and keep your saving faith in him alive; stay awake.

But what Jesus says before that final reminder has to be taken to heart as well. Our King has removed his visible presence from this world. In that way, he's gone. He's still on his heavenly journey, from which he will return. And in the meantime, what are we, his servants, to do? Besides staying awake and alert, what is our divine agenda? Jesus has placed us, his servants, in charge of the house and he has given us work to do. "The house" is anywhere Jesus has assigned you to work. So "the house" is your house. Work there for Jesus while he's away. Be the husband he wants you to be, loving your wife the way he loves his Church. Be the single person he calls you to be, pure and selfless. Be the obedient child. But "the house" where you work is also this house. Serve here in your church. If you are leader, go to your meetings and know what's going on. If you are a giver, give with all your heart. If God has given you a compassionate heart, search out the souls in this house who need your love. "The house" Jesus has given you to work in is also your office building, your community, and your country. Work at your job like you're working for the Lord – because you are. Be the rare neighbor who knows the names of the family next door and looks out for them and their property. Be the rare citizen who respects whomever is in charge (whether you like them or not) and follows laws (whether you like them or not).

Do not fall asleep while the King is away. Stay awake in faith. And stay faithfully busy in all the houses Jesus has given you to work in. And the King will bless you when he arrives. He will bless you with heaven through your living faith in him. And he will reward all the good work you did while your King was away.

Your King is coming. What he says to you, he says to everyone: Watch! Amen.