

"Stay Tuned!"

December 3, 2017

Scripture: Mark 13: 24-37

*<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

*<sup>28</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

*<sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."*

[Play video: View from Above]



Can you believe He'd become human? Do you think it was a bad idea for Him to come down like a baby? Can you believe that He thought they were worth it? Do you see what He saw - compassion, joy, a sense of wonder? And, yeah, we're broken, messed up; we need someone to save us from ourselves... But it does not matter what we think - what matters is what He thinks. And He thinks we're worth it. He thinks we are worth it. Stay tuned – the story is just beginning to unfold. Let us pray.

Welcome to Advent!! The season begins anew. We begin a season today that is so familiar to so many. The Christmas season is like a favorite movie that we have seen over and over yet love to come back to watch it year after year. Someone can start a carol, we know the words, and we can jump right in and sing along. And like our all-time favorite Hollywood movies – we know the lines and can remember what scenes come next. Yet in the Christmas story, when we dig a little deeper, there are plot twists and even a call that invites us to participate in the story. As we journey through this Advent season, we will take a path less traveled and we will look through a lens that is maybe a bit less familiar to us as well. Our passage today begins in an unfamiliar place to begin the Advent season. It comes not from the beginning of Luke, where we find the familiar birth prophecies about John and Jesus and the beautiful prayers offered up by Mary and Zechariah, followed by the birth of Jesus and the angels and shepherds. We will get there, but not today. As we begin today, I invite you to open your Bible to Mark 13, verse 24.

Today we begin with verse 24, reading from the NRSV translation: *"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken"*. We are a long way from a baby in the manger. Today's passage continues with: *"Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds"*. The opening of our passage today is more like "Advent Apocalypse" than the cute little Christmas story we are so familiar with. It shifts us away from simply waiting for the baby Jesus to be born to waiting and watching for something more, for something bigger. It also calls us to waiting with a sense of urgency.

To illustrate how we are to wait, Jesus uses the example found in the fig tree.

In verse 28 Jesus says, *"as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near"*. In the winter months, the fig trees drop their leaves, much like many of the trees around Winner. Then, in the late spring as

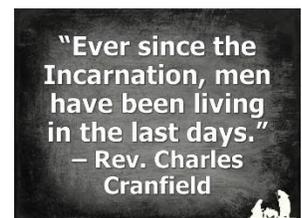


the weather begins to warm, the trees begin to show signs of new life as the branches grow tender with buds beginning to form. In this illustration, Jesus parallels for us the coming of summer with the coming of God's kingdom. Just as the summer comes without any human effort so too will God fulfill the coming of the kingdom in His own time, without any effort on our part. The fig tree showing signs of new life signals not the start of summer, but the nearing of the start of summer. It shows that summer *is* coming but does not say exactly when. This idea draws us into the evolving story, bringing us to the edge of our proverbial seats, wanting and waiting to see what is coming soon.

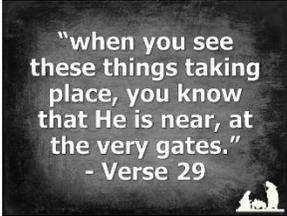


This story that we are stepping into today and the stories we will step into as we journey through Advent are much like the scenes in a movie. They are the scenes that play out as parts of the whole. Each scene may be different from other scenes in a movie, but all of the scenes connect together to form the whole story. This concept is also true of the story we find in the Bible. The story told in the scriptures connects the incarnation of Jesus not only to His earthly life to His crucifixion to resurrection, but it also connects to His return. In God's big picture, Jesus' first and second coming are all facets of one continuous event. So just as the various scenes in a movie work together to tell the bigger story of the movie, so too do the parts of Jesus' story fit together to tell God's divine plan of redemption. Jesus' birth and life and death and resurrection and even His return all comprise scenes in the big story of God's plan for saving our world.

When we consider where we are in God's big plan, we come to see that we are now living in the time of Jesus' return. In the words of the Reverend Charles Cranfield, *"Ever since the Incarnation, men have been living in the last days"*. It is again the "now-and-not-yet" of our faith that I spoke about last Sunday. Ever since Jesus's birth and time on earth, mankind has been waiting for His glorious return. With a sense of anticipation and expectancy, we are called to stay tuned, to be prepared for what comes next, and, again, to be on the edge of our seats.

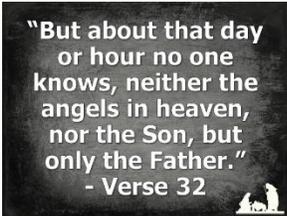


As we return to our passage for today, Jesus then connects us back to the apocalyptic signs that He spoke of in our opening verses. He continues in verse 29, saying, *"when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates"*. Another translation of this verse reads *"at the door"*, which is probably a more familiar image in our minds and brings to our thoughts a picture of Jesus standing at the door of our hearts, knocking, waiting, hoping.



"when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates."  
- Verse 29

The idea of waiting and hoping comes back to us in the last six verses of our passage for today. In verse 32 Jesus says, *"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"*. Jesus tells us that the day and hour are unknown even to Him. Jesus asserts that God alone knows. As I read and study and ponder this verse, I get no feeling or indication that Jesus wants to know or maybe thinks that He deserves to know the day or hour. To me this is very much in accord with the Jesus we see throughout the Gospels. Yes, He is God's Son. Yes, He is God in the flesh. Yes, He is the Savior of the world. But as Jesus walked this world in the flesh, above all else, He demonstrated a complete obedience to God's will and a humble confidence in God in God's plan. We would do well to emulate this Jesus.



"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."  
- Verse 32

In verse 33, Jesus gives us an admonition. He tells us, *"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come"*. Jesus repeats the same call in verses 35 and 36, using the phrase *"keep awake"* in the NRSV translation and *"be alert"* in the translation we have in our pew Bible. It is a call to His disciples then and it is a call to us as disciples here and now. As disciples have been through the ages, we are called to keep alert, to watch, to keep awake. It is a warning to avoid temptation, to stay on the narrow path, to keep our focus on Jesus.



Jesus goes on in the next verses to use another parable to illustrate His point. Starting in verse 34, Jesus tells this story:

*<sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.*

In this story, the focus is on the doorkeeper. Each slave has his task, whatever that may be. But the doorkeeper's task is specific: keep watch. It is the doorkeeper's only charge: keep watch. The doorkeeper is commanded to keep watch. It is his only job. Living faithfully in the present, being attentive to the signs, being ready at any hour for the master's return is not one job among many for the doorkeeper. It is his only job. Disciples are like doorkeepers; their job is to keep watch, to be alert, to keep awake.

Mark 13 ends with the final and most important words. In verse 37, Jesus says, *"And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."* He speaks to us all, to everyone here and to everyone around the world. The end of this age is unknown and will surely come suddenly, so we must live in constant readiness: be awake, be alert, be ready, stay tuned.

We hear the same message in the parable of the fig tree and in the parable of the doorkeeper: the time is here and now. Jesus' second coming is an event that is unfolding now, even today. It is an event that will continue to unfold each day, until the day or hour suddenly comes. There is no time for complacency, for being lazy. There is no time for patience, for procrastination. On the contrary, Jesus tells us to wait impatiently, eagerly, with anticipation.

What would it look like if we lived our life alert, not missing out on the miracles and the work of God that are happening right before us? What would it look like if we lived our life alert, not denying the ways that Jesus is calling us to live out our faith in the world? What would it look like if we lived our life alert, not ignoring the ways that Jesus is speaking to us as He tries to lead and guide our lives? How would our lives be different? How would our faith be different?

What if we entered into this Advent season already out in the fields, ready to receive God's word just as the shepherds received it? What if we lived each day of Advent on the lookout for the places that desperately call us to make known

God's forgiveness and generosity and justice and abundance and love? What if we approached this Advent season like the wise men, continually searching until we find the star that will guide us to what we have been looking for? What if we allowed Jesus to truly be the Lord of our lives? What if, what if, what if.

Stay tuned. Stay alert. Stay ready. Jesus is coming. Jesus is calling. Jesus is here. Stay tuned. Stay alert. Stay ready. Jesus is coming. Jesus is calling. Jesus is here. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How are you being called to live your life more "alert"? Where can you grow by not missing the miracles, the call, or the voice of Jesus?
- 2) Where do you need to receive God's Word, make known His love or justice, or search deeper for the things of God? Pray for the Spirit's help.
- 3) In what ways can you serve God this week by being alert, staying ready, and being tuned in to the Spirit's lead in your life? Make it happen!