THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from Region 6 ELCA

Advent 1, Year B

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First Sunday of Advent: Gospel Text – Mark 13:24-37

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.

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

28 "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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. 34 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. 35 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, [36] or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. [37] And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

SERMON TEXT:

"Just wait until your father gets home!"
Back in the day, these words were meant to strike fear
into the heart of a misbehaving child,
and perhaps give some release of pent-up frustration in an angry mother.

"Just wait until your father gets home!" is how some Christians have tried to get people to believe in God. Just take some verses from today's Gospel reading,
Throw in a few more verses from Revelation and Daniel, and *voila!* droves of people will be converting to Christianity.

Except it doesn't seem to be working.
In part, because I believe that God does not want a relationship with us based on unholy fear, but rather on trust.

The eschatological passages (which is just a big word for "the new age") like we have today were not written for the sake of non-believers.
They were written for the sake of the children of God,
to give them reassurance when times got tough and they were being persecuted.

For instance, today's passage was spoken privately by Jesus to Peter, Andrew, James and John. Or the book of Revelation, which states at the very beginning:

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him
to show his servants what must soon take place…"

So as we hear these passages,
which may strike us as quite fearful,
we must remember that they are sent to us by God in order to prepare us and to strengthen us for Christ's return.
For we are assured that one day Christ will return to set things right once and for all.

We do not know the day and hour,
and apparently we shouldn't bother trying to figure it out,
because Jesus tells his disciple that even he doesn't know.

The prophet Isaiah suggests that we just wait with confidence –
confidence, not in our own goodness –
but with confidence grounded in the memory of ways
God has been and is active in our lives.

Perhaps the return of Christ in glory would be too much for us to bear, if not for this one thing:
Christ's first coming.

The Christ who will return in glory
is the Christ who began his life on earth in a humble stable
and who gave his life on earth on the cross for love of us.

We look to him and are reminded that the God
who remained faithful to the people of Israel,
the God who remained faithful to our forebears, is the same God who remains faithful to us.

Jesus has come to save the world, not to condemn it.

Jesus also reminds us that he has left us with work to do.
Even if we knew with certainty that Jesus would return tomorrow
he asks us to be faithful servants who go about their work
even to the very moment when the master returns.

And he gives us authority, *his* authority, for our tasks.
We are not powerless as we wait for Christ's return.
We are to engage ourselves in kingdom work:
telling our friends and neighbors about Christ's love,
feeding the hungry, clothing the naked,
visiting the imprisoned, bringing hope to the hopeless.

Natural disasters, human greed, violence,
warfare and sickness will not have the last word
and we are called to work against them up until the very second
that Jesus returns.

Finally, Jesus asks that as we await his return we *"keep awake."*
The cliché may be to *"be patient."*
Or how about this: to be present to the moment.
What a great reminder in these days when we count down the
shopping days until Christmas.

Be present to today, right now.
What is God saying to us on the first day of Advent?
What do the hymns speak of?
How can we today be about the work that Jesus has left us to do
until his return?
How can we today prepare our lives for his return?

Preaching professor Will Brosend leaves us this thought:
"Advent is surely a season filled with the temptation to ignore the present moment, always point to and preparing for the next highlight. It is as much a temptation for pastor and preacher as it is for anyone. This Sunday is the First Sunday in Advent and also the Sunday after Thanksgiving. It is easy and common not to be ready – I doubt I am the only one who has spent the Saturday after Thanksgiving scrounging the stores not for early Christmas present but for oversized candles for the congregation's Advent wreath.

Just wait until your father gets home!
These are not words of fear for us but a great and wonderful promise.
Christ will return.

Do not fear for, *"He will also strengthen you to the end,
so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

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