

Mark 13:24-37

²⁴But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power
and glory. ²⁷Then 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.

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

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

Mark 13:24-37, 2014

This passage from the Gospel of Mark is one that is filled with a dichotomy of perspective.

There are words of suffering and release, a glimpse at the end and at the same time the beginning,
the terrors of judgment and the hope of salvation; the release from having to know when the Son of Man will come, and the call to hyper-vigilant watching, being prepared, staying awake.

This passage, and the season we are in likewise, creates tension in the waiting. During Advent people are now waiting for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel,
God with us in the presence of Jesus the first time around.

Advent is the arrival of something important and for us it is Jesus.

In our faith life these days, however, we would spend much of our time anticipating Jesus' return as this passage speaks of,
the return of the resurrected Jesus that signifies the end times of this world, and the question is always, "When?"
When will He come? When will it be?

Is it imminent, or is His return delayed to some far off future?

It all might make you a little crazy trying to figure out what you are supposed to pay attention to.

The first the coming or the second,
or is it His coming today?

Maybe that is why the authors of our lectionary have selected this passage for the beginning of this season of Advent this weekend.

This is a crazy time.

We are torn between the daily routine of life and the anticipation of a memorable day coming up in a few weeks;

memorable because of family get together, trips to Grandma's house, food, and of course gift exchanges.

But, hopefully memorable because of this infant whose birth we will recall and celebrate.

We are torn between going to work, getting the groceries for the week, paying the bills, taking care of the kids, and preparing for this day called Christmas

All this looks different in every home, but there is some form of distraction, anticipation, even anxiety that permeates this season in the weeks before Christmas.

I am not sure that we need to hear the words of Jesus to "keep awake" right now. It is all enough to make our nights sleepless if we let it.

Keeping awake is the prevalent theme for this first weekend in Advent.

The difference between the "keeping awake" of our gospel lesson and the up all night of our lives is the coming of the Son of Man.

On what are we called to focus?

This is a great message for this time of year, and it gets carried through in a surprising way in this last section of the passage,

as Jesus injects subtle references to things the disciples will witness but will not connect to Jesus' words in this conversation until much later on when He is gone.

It draws us to the context of these sayings of Jesus.

At this point in the gospel of Mark Jesus has concluded His public ministry and is spending some time with His disciples, privately speaking with them about the end times.

Then, immediately following this passage the deals are struck and the plan put into action to end Jesus' life.

Certainly he wants to forewarn them about the things to come, and teach them in ways that will shape their understanding of the saving work of God in the world so they can teach those who will come to them after he is gone from the earth.

In verse 35 of our lesson Jesus' words are:

“...keep wake 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...”

Notice the way in which Mark, divides the scenes leading up to Jesus' crucifixion with these words:

- 1) “When it was **evening** he came with the twelve...” (14:17). They shared their last supper.
- 2) in the **middle of the night** is Jesus' prayer and betrayal: “And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy” (14:40); “...he went up to Jesus and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him...”
- 3) At the close of Jesus' trial, Peter denies Jesus for the third time just **as the cock crowed** for the second time” (14:71-72a).
- 4) And then Jesus is delivered to Pilate for trial “As soon as it was morning”(15:1), which for the people of Jesus' day was **at dawn**.

I believe our understanding of this passage must be about the Son of Man, who He is, what He has done, is doing and will do.

an understanding that brings us to the manger at Christmas able to see that this vulnerable infant who lays in the straw is the Son of Man, and the Son of God.

At the same time bring us to the cross understanding that this man we see hanging on a tree is that same Son of Man, the Son of God.

Our understanding of these two things should then shape our anticipation and preparation for the second advent of Jesus the Christ

And our preparation for the Christmas celebration.

Jesus' words leave us with the tension between anticipating the coming of Christ in His first and second advent, and calls us to look for Jesus here and now in the similar places of vulnerability, and in the business of our daily lives;

going to work, getting the groceries, paying the bills, taking care of the kids, sitting down to a meal together as family,

and yes, putting up the Christmas lights, shopping, wrapping gifts, sending cards, and all the other preparations for this day called Christmas you will make during this season of Advent.

Where will you see Jesus?

Will you see him in the longing face of a hungry child

In the Santa collecting for the Salvation Army to feed the hungry,

In the tear rolling down the cheek of the lonely,

In the empty chair where the loved one used to sit?

This season of Advent can be a time of joyful anticipation and it can be hectic, and sad.

But, in the midst of it all, perhaps you can be more attentive to the vulnerability and needs of those around you,

and be open and honest about your own vulnerability and needs so that you can receive the care of others

who care about you, and can be the Christ's presence for you.

Perhaps in these ways you will experience Jesus coming and God's presence in your life even in the here and now,

and in this way discover, share, and participate in the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ once again.