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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 3, 2017
1st Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 63: 16-17, 64:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Hymns: 55; 71; 64; 413:6 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 13:32-37

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴*It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. ³⁵Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— ³⁶lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our coming Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Understanding Advent

We start a new church year this morning. That in itself can be confusing for some people. What is this about that we can't wait to start the year with the calendar year? Well this is about Advent! So what's Advent? Well the word in itself is fairly simple, even though we use it only occasionally in different contexts. It is always a reference to something coming, a coming that changed

things, changed things dramatically. In church we use the word advent to refer to Christ's coming. So it makes sense that we should give His Advent some special consideration before we celebrate Christmas when Jesus came into the world as the Babe of Bethlehem, what His birth means, and what its impact ought to be on our lives.

Jesus coming into the world born of the Virgin Mary was a dramatic, even dynamic force for change in the world. You see, the coming of Jesus was the coming of the Son of God into the flesh, and the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah that was to come into the world. It impacts the entire world, but it is also a very personal power for change, for the Lord also comes into the hearts of believers. Finally we are led to look for the final coming of Christ with power and great glory on the Last Day.

That covers the facts but it doesn't really explain why we need these four Sundays, and then we also have three midweek services in preparation for the observing the Lord's advent in His birth. The answer is quite simple. Great events should impact lives. There are no greater events than these in the history of the world, or in your personal lives. Often times we begin to get in a rut in life in which the great gets confused with the mundane, and we begin to regard them alike. This is a time for us to awaken ourselves spiritually to how important the Advent of the Lord is, and how it should not be simply an academic acknowledgement of the Jesus' coming, but a renewal of heart and life.

So we begin our preparation for Jesus' advent with Jesus own words of exhortation for --

THEME: Advent Watchfulness.

Jesus begins with an encouragement to --

I. Pay Attention.

Mark 13:32-33 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."

This is the point with which we may be most familiar. An end to this world is coming, but exactly when that day is coming is hidden. God in His wisdom knows that this would not be beneficial for man to know. For that matter it is not known by the angels in heaven, or even by Jesus during His state of humiliation, but by the Father alone. The Lord knows the nature of man. He knows the weakness of our flesh. He knows that we are inclined to let things slip that don't seem urgent, even if they are important. If we knew when the Last Day was going to come then we would think it was not a matter of concern until that day arrived. Things spiritual would be neglected, and that would be devastating for many souls. The faith of many Christians would be neglected, and the spiritual loss would be immense. This kind of spiritual neglect happens enough without us knowing the time of the Lord's coming.

So the Lord Jesus makes the point that since we do not know that day or that hour then we need to pay attention. The first injunction of the Lord is "*Take heed.*" One might translate this also as "be on guard." The idea is to keep one's eyes open to what is going on around us in this world. In this entire chapter Jesus was talking about the signs of His final coming. We see things in this world that tell us that things are not going to continue on forever as they have been. It may be natural calamities, such as great storms like the hurricanes that buffeted the golf coast and the islands in the Atlantic this past summer, or the earthquakes that shook Iraq and Iran in recent weeks, or all the talk about global warming and its devastating effects on the earth. We also hear the rumors of war on the news connected with North Korea. We hear and read about horrible acts of terrorism almost continually. We see the evil in this world growing worse and worse as immorality seems to rule the day. We should note all these things as signs that this world will not go on forever, and that the Word of the Lord concerning His return should be heeded.

Yes, it is true that the Lord spoke these words concerning the last age of the earth 2000 years ago and the world still goes round and the sun still comes up every morning. Don't be lulled into complacency. Remember Peter's words from his second epistle:

2 Peter 3:8-10 "Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one

day. ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

So one ought to watch and pray. We need to be attentive to our manner of life that it is not all about the here and now and these things which shall all pass away. Rather life is about things spiritual, for that is why the Lord has extended this last age of the earth. It is His will that more souls be saved, that more sinners be called to repentance.

In this connection we come to Jesus’ second point concerning Advent Watchfulness:

II. Attention to Duty.

Mark 13:34-36 “*It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.* ³⁵Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—³⁶lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.”

Jesus is the man who went into that far country. He removed His visible presence from us as He ascended into heaven (but this was only His visible presence. He did not leave us and forsake us). He ascended up on high and led captivity captive and gave gifts to His church. (Ephesians 4:8) The gifts are the called servants of the Word, as well as gifts given to all of His children that they might serve the Lord in His absence.

That is exactly what Jesus presents in this little parable. He gave **authority** to His servants. That is too easily passed over. **He gave authority to His servants.** Jesus gave to His Church on earth the keys of the kingdom so that they might have power, His power, “to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and retain the sins of the

impenitent as long as they do not repent.” (Luther’s Small Catechism, What is the Office of the Keys) Before Jesus ascended into heaven He commissioned His disciples, that includes all who believe in Him, to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (Mark 16:15) This is done by the authority of Jesus; it is **His** message of love and forgiveness found in **His** cross. It is a powerful message that changes hearts and free sinners from guilt and condemnation.

So we know that Jesus gave authority to His servants to act on His behalf, to speak in His name. Then He gave to each of His servants, that includes each and every one of them, his work. We have a Christ-given purpose for being here on earth. It is not to be self-serving and get all the fun we can out of life. It is to serve Him faithfully in the time He gives us in this life. Luther made the point that no matter what our station in life, father, mother, son or daughter, master mistress, servant, if we go about our work diligently as to the Lord, we are serving the Lord in the calling He has given us. We are serving the Lord in a manner that glorifies Him. We are serving the Lord in a way that leads others to seek out the Lord, and perhaps to ask us concerning the hope that we have in Christ. So yes, we all should look to see what gifts or abilities the Lord has given us which may be used directly for the advancement of the kingdom among us, but let us also realize that every God pleasing vocation in this life is to be seen as a calling from God, and we ought to go about our duty faithfully.

As we do this let us keep our eyes open for the opportunity to share the love of Christ with others by words and action. Let the love of Christ flow through you to the world. Don’t be stingy about it, don’t procrastinate. Each day’s opportunity is there for that day. And we don’t know when the Lord is coming. This lends urgency to our calling as servants of Christ, an urgency that comes to us from Christ Himself!

In this little parable the doorkeeper is given special injunction here to watch. This is clearly a note of special attention to the called pastor’s and teachers to be attentive to the need of the flock for reminders of the signs of the times, and the need stay alert and attentive to duty. We don’t know when our Master returns. We don’t want to be found sleeping on the job. Remembering the

Lord's faithfulness toward us, we also want to be found faithful by the Lord on the day of His return. We should serve the Lord with gladness. After all, that Day we are watching for shall be a day of glory. Advent Watchfulness is watching in --

III. Anticipation of Jesus' Return.

Mark 13:37 "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

For the child of God this isn't a warning that should fill our hearts with dread. It is rather the waiting for a very special and joyous culmination of events. It is like the laborer who is counting the days to retirement, the teenager anticipating graduation and going off to college, the child watching for the gifts to appear beneath the Christmas tree and the hour when he can finally tear off the paper and reveal the gift hidden beneath.

We watch for the Lord's return with anticipation because it will be a day of majesty and great glory. It will be a sight unlike anything in human earthly experience. And what awaits us is joy supernal. All the frustrations that come with sin's corruption in this world will vanish away with all the vanity of this earth, and together with all the saints, we will see the glory of our Savior and the bliss of heaven that awaits us with the Lord. So Advent watchfulness is about lifting our eyes from the mundane, from the ordinary of this world, eagerly watching, anticipating that which the Lord Jesus has prepared for us in heaven, and knowing His promise that He will come again and receive us to Himself in heaven.

That will be good, very good indeed. "**Take heed, watch, and pray, for you do not know when the time is,**" but we do know the day is coming as it has been appointed by our Father in heaven. Let us live in Advent Watchfulness!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.