



Nov. 29, 2020 Mk. 13: 24-37. Is 64_1-9.

First Sunday of Advent

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

In these times of turmoil, both in nature and in culture; with anxiety levels off the charts, the temptation to resort to end time explanations is everywhere. Yet, Jesus himself resisted this dooms day escapism approach. Instead, he says, be alert! Realize that these changes will come and bring with them the future. He knew that change and growth always comes with struggle and risk. How good are you at trusting Jesus' promise this year?

Mk. 13:24-37

24 But in those days, following that **distress**, "the **sun** will be **darkened**, and the **moon** will not give its light; 25 the **stars** will fall from the sky, and the **heavenly bodies** will be **shaken**.' 26 At that time men will see the **Son of Man** coming in **clouds** with great power and **glory**. 27 And he will send his **angels** and gather his elect from the **four winds**, from the ends of the **earth** to the ends of the **heavens**. 28 Now learn this lesson from the **fig** tree:

As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves **come out**, you know that **summer** is **near**. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is **near**, right at the door. 30 I tell you the truth, this **generation** will certainly not **pass away** until all these things have happened. 31 **Heaven** and **earth** will **pass away**, but my **words** will never pass away. 32 No one **knows** about that **day** or **hour**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the **Father**. 33 Be on **guard**! Be **alert**! You do not **know** when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his **house** and puts his **servants** in charge, each with his **assigned** task, and tells the one at the door to keep **watch**. 35 Therefore keep **watch** because you do not **know** when the owner of the **house** will come back--whether in the **evening**, or at **midnight**, or when the **rooster crows**, or at **dawn**. 36 If he comes **suddenly** do not let him find you **sleeping**. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: '**Watch!**'"

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus tells us that even he does not know the future. But he does know God's promise.

What helps you to trust the promise like Jesus trusted?

PRAYER: Lord, like the trees around me these days, my branches are becoming bare of leaves. When I look around at all the struggle and turmoil in the world, it causes that same struggle and turmoil in my heart. Help me to face all this with the same hope that Jesus speaks about, as he uses the fig tree that will endure to produce buds in the spring. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

DISTRESS: Periods of distress often reveal what we are made of. We look back on them as times we hope never to have to live through again, but would not want to miss the growth they evoked.

Do you think the disciples could appreciate what Jesus was saying to them? What might have gotten in the way of their hearing? What gets in your way in stressful times that blocks your hearing?

SUN: In Jesus' day many people worshipped the sun. An eclipse was an event that struck terror in the hearts of the uninformed. When the days shortened in the winter months, it was a great relief to see them begin to lengthen again. The disciples, being forewarned, would not panic when the predicted event came about.

Now the sun becomes a reality that moves from being a god, to a sign of the power of God. If you had been one of the disciples, what comfort would Jesus' predictions have given you? Would it enable you to 'hang in there' better?

DARKENED: To be dark is to have no light to see. In these days where we seldom experience total darkness, it is hard to imagine the terror that would ensue as darkness covered the earth. By being forewarned, the disciples had a 'light' or 'insight' not available to others. See Is. 13:10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10,31:3:15 and Haggai 2:6,21.

Have you ever been able to endure a trial much better because you had been forewarned? Did the 'light' of that information give you an 'insight' into what was going on?

MOON: The moon was a great gift to people. Without it, a person would have no way to reckon time. Those who studied the moons phases and cycles had great power in their cultures.

Without sun or moon there would be no day or night. There could be no life. There would be total disorientation. Try to imagine the chaos that this condition would generate.

STARS: The stars also functioned as sources of information. Their places in the sky steered ships and marked the passing seasons. It was thought that each person's birth added another star in the sky, and its position influenced your life.

Imagine the terror in seeing your star falling out of the skies along with all the other stars. What would that mean to you?

HEAVENLY BODIES / ANGELS: There is no consensus about the meaning of any of these realities. It seems to mean the army of cosmic forces or messengers of God.

If even these realities are shaken, what chance does a mere mortal have in a situation like this? How would you express such a condition today?

SHAKEN: To shake is to move rapidly back and forth or up and down. That which is not flexible often crumbles when shaken.

Would this advance information enable the disciples to avoid crumbling when the shaking happens? What in your faith life is vulnerable to being shaken these days?

SON OF MAN: Jesus totally identifies with our humanity, and chose to accept our human condition so he could really be with us.

Given the fact that the disciples were trying to prepare themselves for losing Jesus, would his coming as the Son of Man be a source of reassurance and comfort for them? What does this say about Jesus' second coming?

CLOUDS: In Daniel 7:13, we hear of the son of man coming in the clouds. Clouds existed between the heavens and the earth. Jesus unites heaven and earth in him and will come again to bring these two realities together.

Often the clouds are a source of great power as in a storm. These clouds have a great power but they bring glory instead of destruction. How do you envision Jesus' second coming?



GLORY: Jesus sees his role as the one who makes visible and tangible the Father. We use the word glory to express the ultimate in beauty or achievement.

Try to talk about your image of this final moment. What makes it glorious? What feelings come as you try to imagine this event?

FOUR WINDS: The gathering would include the totality of creation. Nothing or no one will be excluded.

What does this suggest about this event? Does the thought of it excite you or frighten you?

FIG: The fig tree is one of the most common and prized trees in Israel. It is one of the few trees in that part of the world that loses its leaves. It was another of the ways that a person could keep track of time.

How can watching nature and its cycles enable us to "see God", or understand God's processes?

COME OUT: To come out in the spring is to signal the new growing season.

How does this reality help you understand the new happening that Jesus is describing?

SUMMER: Summer is the time that we have to grow things.

Why do you think Jesus chose an image of summer for this parable?

NEAR: The time of Jesus was a time of closeness for humanity and God. The disciples were attracted to this closeness.

Does the God of Jesus draw nearer to you when you reflect on the Word?

GENERATION: The people of Jesus' time understood this to mean their individual lifetimes.

Since humanity was the last of the generations of creation, could it mean this human generation? If so, what does this suggest?

PASS AWAY: *Something that is bound by space and time is limited in duration and can pass away. Jesus' words are not limited, and therefore can reach beyond the limits of created reality.*

What comfort do you get from knowing that Jesus' words cannot pass away?

HEAVENS: The heavens were thought to be the residence of the gods, and therefore eternal. We now know that they also are part of the created reality, so they too can pass away.

How does living in the space age affect your understanding of this passage?

WORDS: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jn. 1:1. Jesus is the Word of God, who spoke the words of God.

How do you understand this description of Jesus? How can a word become someone? Something?

KNOWS: Only God knows all. Jesus is content to live with the human limitations we all share.

How does this help us to live now and wait for his second coming? How could this help us as we face those predictions of the end of the world?

DAY / HOUR: Much time and effort has been spent trying to figure the time of the last days. Jesus, himself, tells us that even he does not know the day or the hour of this most important event.

Does this lack of knowledge of something come in conflict with your understanding of who Jesus was? How does Jesus' lack of knowledge help you to understand his self-description as the Son of Man?

FATHER: Calling God, Father, in the way Jesus does, ultimately brings him into conflict with the prevailing ideas of God.

Have you ever thought much about how Jesus refers to God his Father?

GUARD: To guard is to protect something or someone.

What are you protecting in your faith life?

ALERT/ WATCH: Being on the alert and watching are two dimensions of the same reality.

How are you alert and watching? What are you looking for?

HOUSE: Your house is the place where you live and create a life for yourself and your family.

Do you envision all of creation as the house God is protecting?

EVENING/ MIDNIGHT/ ROOSTER CROWS/ DAWN: All these times of the day are times when you can't see too well.

What special kinds of alertness/ watchfulness are required when your vision is limited?

SUDDENLY: Changes often seem to come up out of the 'blue' and catch us by surprise.

What changes in your faith life could catch you by surprise? Or are you beyond surprises?

SLEEPING: Often when we give up a sense of wonder we find ourselves getting sleepy.

What might be causing you to get drowsy in your growth in faith?

PARALLEL TEXTS:

Mk. 13:24: // Mt. 24:29f; Lk.21:25f; **Mk. 13:25** // Is. 13:10; Ez. 32:7; Joel 2:10; **Mk. 13:27** // Mt. 14:62; Dan. 7:13f; **Mk. 13:28** // Mt. 24:32-36; Lk. 21:29-33

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Dan. 12:1-3; Ps. 16:5,8-11; Heb. 10: 11-14, 18; Mk. 13: 24-37;

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Sam. 1:4-20; Ps. 16; Heb. 10:14-25; Mk. 13:1-8;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

“Whenever you interact with people, don't be there primarily as a function or a role, but as the field of conscious Presence. You can only lose something that you have, but you cannot lose something that you are.” Eckhart Tolle

13 "It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts. But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that he speaks; with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that he gives, and with the heart of anyone in need that he longs for shelter. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement

We can walk without fear, full of hope and courage and strength to do His will, waiting for the endless good which He is always giving as fast as He can get us able to take it in. - George Macdonald

we come to the lived realization that we can commit ourselves to God and experiences God's security in our lives even while some of the conscious problems we have about God remain unresolved. In the lived assurance that God loves and accepts us beneath the level of our conscious problems, we find that God's presence in our lives gives us, at once, the strength to address our problems and the strength to live with a security beyond them. Arthur A. Vogel, Radical Christianity and the Flesh of Jesus

Jesus was truly free. His freedom was rooted in his spiritual awareness that he was the Beloved Child of God. He knew in the depth of his being that he belonged to God before he was born, that he was sent into the world to proclaim God's love, and that he would return to God after his mission was fulfilled. This knowledge gave him the freedom to speak and act without having to please the world and the power to respond to people's pains with the healing love of God Henri Nouwen

If you watch your mind, you will see you live most of your life in the past or in the future, both of which Jesus warns us against. That's just the way the mind works. If you are to experience the ever-present and ever-coming Christ, the one place you have to be is the one place you are usually not: NOW HERE or "nowhere." Everything that happens to you happens right now; if you can't be present right now, nothing new is ever going to happen to you. You will not experience your experiences; they will not go to any depth in your soul. You really won't grow unless you're willing to live right here, right now—to be present. Richard Rohr

Awareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. . . . The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world." Eckhart Tolle

The question, you see, is not to prepare (for something specific) but to live in a state of ongoing preparedness so that, when someone who is drowning in the world comes into your world, you are ready to reach out and help . . . to let them be part of your life in God -- that's ministering. - Henri J. M. Nouwen

Herod continued the social and economic traditions of his Hasmonean predecessors. He was at the top of a pyramid that included his sons, among them Archelaus, Antipas and Philip, various and sundry relatives from his home country of Idumea (in the Hebron hills), as well as army veterans who had served him faithfully. On this fortunate group, known as "friends of the king," Herod bestowed large portion of land-which he confiscated from his enemies – in and around Jericho, at Ein-Gedi on the shore of the Dead Sea, in Heshbon in Transjordan and Sebastia in Samaria. These homes were not even the permanent residence of their owners but simply their country estates Gospel accounts indicate that the landlord do not occupy the premises continuously. One of Mark's parables is an example. Jesus tells his listeners: "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my word shall not away" (Mk.13:31) Pg. 30. Hirschfeld, Yizhar & Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. A Country Gentleman's Estate. BAR 3/05

"Watch!" does not speak of the coming of death, though, does not call me into living awake in the present moment, but calls me into living awake in a presence, "Watch and pray!" I think of Brother Lawrence in his moment of awakening, seeing a dry and leafless tree in winter and knowing it would put forth leaves in spring, would blossom and bear fruit. The tree is like one of the parables of Jesus. I am that tree! I can see the illumining, feel the kindling, as I contemplate the image. I can see the light, feel the warmth – it is the presence of God! Pg. 62. Dunne, John. [The House of Wisdom](#). San Francisco. Harper & Row. 1985.

Second Coming of Christ

The Second Coming of Christ refers to the Christian belief in the future return of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead (see JUDGMENT, LAST), an event that will end the present world order. The New Testament never uses the term Second Coming. It refers instead simply to Christ's parousia ("presence" or "arrival"). In Heb. 9:28, however, the hope of Christ's appearing a "second time" is expressed. This hope originated in the Easter experiences of the first disciples, which communicated a sense of the incompleteness of Christ's work and the promise of its future completion. The early Christians expressed these convictions by identifying the resurrected Christ with the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13) and by combining this text with Ps. 110:1 (as in Mark 14:62). At first the Christian community expected an imminent return of Christ, but it adjusted itself with remarkable ease to the notion of an indefinitely postponed Second Coming. Taken from: The New Groliers Multimedia Encyclopedia

If we would only give, just once, the same amount of reflection to what we want to get out of life that we give to the question of what to do with two weeks' vacation, we would be startled at our false standards and the aimless procession of our busy days.... Dorothy Canfield Fisher

Death can come at any minute, in any way. We do not know what is in store tomorrow, or, whether there is a tomorrow, or even a tonight! But still, we have the golden present. Now we are alive and kicking. What should we do now? Love all, serve all. – Swami Satchidananda

"We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking." - Richard Rohr

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything. George Bernard Shaw

Go ahead! Courage! In the spiritual life, those who do not go forward go backwards. It is the same with a boat which must always go forward. If it stands still, the wind will blow it back. - Padre Pio

SELECTED READINGS

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