

Sermon for November 30, 2014 – Advent 1

Mark 13:32-37 (NIV84)

Theme: Servants of Christ: Keep watch.

- 1) *By doing the work he has given you to do.*
- 2) *By expecting his return at any moment.*

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!' "*

Does this sound familiar? A mother says to her children: "I am going to run a few errands this afternoon. While I am gone, I want you to straighten up the house. John, it's your turn to clean the bathroom. Michael, pickup your bedroom and playroom. Tanya, I want you to clean and sweep the kitchen, and vacuum the living room. If you all do a good job by the time I get back, we will go see a movie. If not, there will be consequences." The kids answer: "Ok Mom, we'll get it done."

What will happen next? Will the kids waste their time playing games and watching TV, or will they get their work done? What would you do?

In our sermon text, Jesus offers a very similar illustration and applies it to us. He, our faithful God, has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us. Before leaving, he gave his followers duties to carry out before he returns. Will we be faithful in carrying them out? Let Jesus' gracious warning encourage us to do so, under the theme: **Servants of Christ: Keep watch.** 1) *By doing the work he has given you to do.* 2) *By expecting his return at any moment.*

Part One: By doing the work he has given you to do.

Our sermon text is part of the instruction Jesus gave his disciples on the Tuesday before his crucifixion concerning the end of the world. After telling his disciples about the signs that would precede Judgment Day, he says:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Now wait a second. Isn't Jesus true God? Doesn't he know everything? Yes, he does. How, then, could Jesus say that even "the Son" does not know the hour of his return? Remember that when Jesus spoke these words, he was still in his state of humiliation: i.e. he was not making full use of his divine knowledge and power so that he could be our substitute and win our salvation. And the fact that Jesus kept this knowledge from himself while he walked this earth shows that it really isn't our place to know exactly when the last day will be, but to simply be prepared for it when it happens, as Jesus says:

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

In our short sermon text, Jesus uses three different Greek words for "watch" – two of which are found in the verse I just read. *Be on guard* – is literally "be looking." *Be alert* – is literally "be awake and

vigilant.” I don’t know how Jesus could be any more emphatic. He wants us to be always looking, always expecting that today, yes this very hour might very well be our last on this sin cursed earth! Instead of wasting time trying to figure out when he is returning, let us simply be ready for it. And how? Jesus says:

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.

The man is Jesus, his house is the Church and we (who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins) are his servants. Where our English Bible says: “*He. . . puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task,*” the original text literally says that the man “*gave his servants the authority – each for his work.*”

This “giving of authority” reminds me of what Jesus did after his resurrection, when *he breathed on* [his disciples] *and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* Just 10 days after his ascension, Jesus affirmed this authority by pouring the Holy Spirit upon his entire Church. Every Christian has been called to be Christ’s representative in the world. We all have the blessed privilege of telling those who repent of their sins that they are forgiven, and warning those who refuse to repent.

But our text also says that the man gave *each* [servant] *his assigned task*. Just as the entire crew of an aircraft carrier carries out a single mission and yet each person on that ship has their own unique job they have been specifically assigned and trained to do; so also even though we – the church – have the singular mission of sharing the Gospel, each one of us has been uniquely gifted and called to perform specific tasks in support of that mission. St. Paul puts it this way: ⁴ *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,* ⁵ *so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.* ⁶ *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.* ⁷ *If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;* ⁸ *if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* (Romans 12:4-8, NIV84)

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Each one of us has been uniquely gifted for a specific task in order that we, the church, might faithfully carry out its mission. So let me ask you what is the special and unique way God has gifted you to contribute to the Church’s mission? Are you a young mother – entrusted with children whom the LORD wants you to nurture with his word? Are you an elderly person shut in at home with lots of time to pray? Do you have the know-how to help with a project at Church? Do you have leadership skills to serve on the council? Are you filled with compassion? Are you good at encouraging? If you are struggling to figure out what gifts God has given you to support the Church’s mission, talk to me; maybe I can help you figure it out.

The next question I have for you is this: are you faithfully carrying out the tasks God has given you? Are you living your life remembering that you’re God’s servant on assignment, or do you live your life as if it’s your own to do with whatever you please? Remember what the Scriptures say: *You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NIV84)

Sadly, we often forget that we are the Lord’s servants, don’t we? It is so easy to live our lives for ourselves – doing what we want instead of the things God has prepared us to do for him. We are often like children who, instead of immediately doing what their mother told them to do, continue to play or watch T.V. What will happen to those children when their mother comes home and catches them not doing what they are suppose to be doing?

What will happen if the Lord catches us not doing what he asked us to do?

This should lead us to cry out: “Lord, forgive me for not doing the things you want me to do – for living for myself instead of your glory. Remind me of your grace, how you willingly left your home in heaven in order to live, suffer and die for me. It is only because of your work for me that I not only can call myself your servant, but also your son. Thank you, Lord, for paying the debt I owe. In the peace of your forgiveness, help me live to you glory – being the faithful servant you want me to be and doing my part to share your Gospel in all the world.”

Part Two: By expecting his return at any moment.

Jesus continues: 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.*

At the beginning of my sermon I mentioned that Jesus uses three different words in our text that have to do with the idea of watching. Now, at the end of our text, Jesus uses the same “watch” word 3 times (a word which literally means, “Stay awake”) to emphasize our need to always be ready for Christ’s return. And this leads to my next point: notice that all of the possible times Jesus mentions for the master’s return occur during the night. The point is clear: Christ will return when people are spiritually sleepy and least expect it, so be prepared.

Do you want to know a good way you can be prepared for Christ’s return? I will tell you: Begin every morning with prayer recalling God’s love and blessings, asking for his help for the coming day. End each day in prayer, thanking God for his blessings, asking him to forgive all sin and keep you safe at night. Eat your meals thanking God for his providence. Do your job like you are working for Christ. Love your spouse. Love your family. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ and, when you look at your enemies, remember Jesus died for them too and love them as Christ loves you. Take time in the day to read the Bible or a devotion. At the very least take some time to think about Jesus’ saving love for you. Be ready to give an answer to those who ask about your hope in Christ, but do so with gentleness and respect. It is easy to prepare for Christ’s return. And do you want to know something else? Living in preparedness for Christ is actually more joyful than indulging in sin and spiritual laziness.

Our text continues: *If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.* What is the sleeping Jesus is referring to? It is the sleep of returning to sinful self-centeredness, doing everything for you instead of for Christ – working to build your dreams and your life instead of Christ’s kingdom.

Now we all sin, and, inadvertently, serve ourselves rather than Christ on occasion. When this happens and we realize it, we can go to the cross in repentance trusting in Christ for forgiveness. This is more like “dozing off” and not the “sleeping” Jesus refers to in our text. The “sleeping” Jesus is talking about is prolonged and continued selfishness which our “dozing off” can lead to if we are not careful. It is best not even to doze off, but if we do, let us wash our sleepiness away with the cold water of remembering who God declared us to be at our baptism: his dearly loved children who are forgiven in Christ.

And so Jesus says: *What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

In other words be diligent in your faith by doing the things God wants you to do – expecting his return at any moment. Remember your baptism, read your Bible and partake of the Lord’s Supper in order to grow in your faith in God’s saving grace. Persistently share the Gospel through your words and actions, because everyday that passes is most certainly a day closer to Christ’s return. Don’t let this day catch you unawares, but watch for it – always clothed in Christ’s righteousness through faith in him. Amen