Mark 13:24-37 Pr. Cheryl Muncy 1st Sunday in Advent/B Bethel Lutheran – Joplin Isaiah 64:1-9 December 3, 2023 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

 Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from our Creator God and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

 Today is the first Sunday in Advent, the first Sunday of the church year. People are excitedly waiting for the coming of Christ. Three weeks from now is Christmas Eve. So what is with hearing a Gospel message that sounds more apocalyptic than we would expect at the beginning of Advent? We are waiting for Christ, but today it’s to be ready, watching, alert for his coming back.

 There are many things we do that require us to be alert and watchful: driving a vehicle, working, preparing meals, decorating homes, sports, and list goes on. How watchful are we, really?

 As we wait for the birth of the Christ child, Jesus is talking to his disciples about his leaving and returning. He is just days from going to the cross and preparing them for what to watch for.

*“24 ‘But 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.” (Mark 13)*

This sounds ominous, but yet, it exciting. The talk it seems these days, with the wars, natural disasters, diseases, hatred and killings, is about the ‘end time’ coming. “It’s happening; just look around; listen to the news; etc.” I don’t mean to sound lackadaisical about this, but these events have been happening for centuries. We just happen to have more improved ways of communication to show and report it now than they did even a century or so ago. It’s instant now. Darkness seems to surround us.

Our daylight time is getting shorter; the nights longer. This time of the year does bring more darkness to our world, to our lives, to our very beings. It’s full of shadows and cold; dimming what little light we have.

People have already started shopping and spending unheard of dollars above the average. The days are counted down and the baking has begun. Lights and greenery and decorations are put up on trees and houses and scattered across yards and streets. The advertisements for everything and anything pop up all over. Salvation Army bell ringers are out in force, hoping for a little donation. Food drives and holiday baskets are given to those in need. Lots of things are happening and I wonder if we are ever really ready for the big day. Are we ready?

Even as we prepare for this joyous occasion, hoping and praying for the perfect gifts, we may find that those shadows creep in and anxiety hits; worry about guests and clean houses are constantly in the back of our minds. Is everything going according to schedule? What time is it? We have so many events to attend. The events of our lives seem to multiply, and the time shrinks. For some people, this time of the year is depressing not only because of the lack of light, but because they have no one to love them; they are homeless and hungry; jobless; alone - having no family around or are estranged; are the stranger in the midst. But are we ready? Are we really ready, and for what?

It is hard to look forward to something good coming in about four weeks when we hear all the terrible news of what is happening in our world. Wars and threats of bombs; child disappearances; light-fights between neighbors; angry words leading to murder; governmental discord and all the sexual harassment allegations coming forth. Are we ready for what comes next?

None of us are truly ready for the unknown, but that is just what Jesus is telling us we should be. Mark starts out this chapter with some horrible happenings on the horizon. He is trying to prepare his disciples for the horrors to come. This may seem like a timeline for his return, but really, one can try, but the time won’t be what you think it should be.

There are lessons to be learned about the coming of Christ again, but there also seems to be some fear in the future because we dread all the events that surround His coming. We recognize the darkness and wonder how long we will have to endure it. We have a timeline for the darkness as far as knowing when the time changed twice a year, but for the moment Christ returns, we do **not,** and we will **never** know the time. Even the Son of God doesn’t know. ‘But – this lesson has significance for the present; it lies not just in getting our attention now before it’s too late, but in offering us a picture of hope. In the midst of the darkness and shadows, Jesus comes to us.’ 1.

Jesus points to the distress and the darkness that follows it. But then he tells us of a reality greater than the darkness, something that chases it away with glory. This is great stuff! Really great stuff! “26*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out his angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” (Mark 13)*

This is going to be great and will be such a powerful brightness, no one can look at it and it will drive away the darkness that is upon us. Here is what we need to hear though. What Jesus shares with his disciples is not only a truth for the end of time, but it is a *truth for the end times in which we live*. Yes, we have the darkness, the shadows, but we also have the one coming who is greater than the darkness.

This truth, this reality comes to us as a tiny, helpless newborn baby boy. He comes in the darkness of night with the brightest star shining overhead. He comes to us in all our struggles day in and day out. He comes to us in the deepest depths of despair and loneliness, our ups and downs. He comes to us as we battle the troubled seas of life and when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. He comes to us when we are broken and torn by sin, guilt and shame.

Christ coming to us and making all things new is the reality and it is the reality of finding hope. Hope coming to us in Christ. The Christ who has come, is coming and will come again. The Christ who rescues us, sets us free. The Christ who brings to our troubled waters calmness and peace. The Christ who heals us, makes us whole again. The one who redeems us, forgives us, and offers us something no one else can – salvation – salvation by grace through faith. The one who calls himself the Resurrection and the Life. This hope isn’t just for the end time but for all time. The truth is that the Son of Man has come, is coming, and will come again. The question is, “Are you ready?”

I don’t know how this is going to find you – how you might be feeling or what you may be thinking. While some people are excited about Advent and Christmas, others dread it. It isn’t all about the gifts and lights and decorations and baking and snow. It’s about a God who comes to us in the darkness and shadows of our lives to give us a *hope*. A hope that comes with peace and salvation and a light to light the way and the world. A *hope* that all things will be new.

As we light our candles here and at home during this Advent season, may it be a light by you watch and wait by. A light that shines our way to the Savior who has come, is coming and will come again. Come out of the darkness and watch. Be ready. Be ready to burst out the door like a little child excited to see a parent coming home after being gone. Be ready for the promise is one of salvation and grace.

Yes, there is much evil surrounding us, yet we have so many miracles all around us. Wake up every part of your body and soul. See the world around you. See all the blessings of God surrounding your life. Be alert! Be ready!

Amen.

1. Unknown source