

Prayer of the Day:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Alleluia. (Revelation 22:20 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

It's difficult to believe, but the season of Advent is upon us. The paraments are blue to remind us that our eyes are on the sky as we await the return of the worlds only true King and to remind us of the watchful waiting endured by the Old Testament believers for that first coming of the Christ, in a lowly manger in Bethlehem. Of course, the reminders of that are around us too today. Already Christmas pushes in, has too as concerts, programs and services appear on calendars, lights pop up on houses, trees go up and stores changes decorations as fast as we can clear tables in eager anticipation of the 12 day celebration of the Christmas season or at least the one day paper shredding party as presents are presented.

Perhaps it's a bit of all that (or just the words of our lesson today) which has me asking a question, this Advent season. "How good are we at waiting?" Or, using the words of our lesson today, "How good are we at watching?" Perhaps even the suggestion of more watchfulness and waiting following the drum beat of that phrase throughout the season of End Times has us wondering why we're still talking about this but then that just proves the point does it not? So as we turn our thoughts to the words of Mark 13 today, we find our selves "Still Watching ..." and then wondering out loud "Is that a question ... or is it a statement of hope?"

"Are we there yet?!?" It's usually said with that half whine half wonder all exasperated tone from the little people in the back who desperately need to stretch their legs during what has become a long car ride. Patience is a tough lesson to learn.

Watchfulness might even be tougher. A combination of poised anticipation and patience, it might find its most apt illustration in the terrorist alerts of our world today or in the world of hunting and fishing. Watching and waiting for the big buck to come out of the woods and into range or waiting for the line to give that subtle jerk that announces the fish on the other end. Waiting usually knows it's termination point, watchfulness asks us to be on guard for any moment, prepared for an unannounced arrival. Today Jesus says "*Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.*"

But then the very fact that Jesus must say this alerts us to the fact that we aren't always or He would not have said it. When you are driving new roads, I would imagine there is much more caution behind the wheel. Not knowing speed limits, where curves and dips are and of course not

Lesson: Mark 13:32-37

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!' " – NIV84

being familiar with those spots where your driving is being monitored by the friendly neighborhood police officer, keeps us on our toes. However, drive that road everyday, morning and night for months, years even and you begin to learn where the curves required you to slow and where the dips might make a bigger bump. Perhaps you even learn the favorite spots where the police car parks to survey the road and that's when the speed limits seem a bit more optional, a little faster here and a little slower there means I shave a minute or two of the daily commute. Until the lights start flashing behind you, the deer pops out in front of you, or the driver in front of us does the unexpected and remind us that we aren't always as watchful as we think.

That's the point of our lesson this morning. Jesus stands before us and asks "Are you still watching?" He hopes to break us free of the apathy that can come from the long wait that is life in this sinful world. *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.*

Indifference is dangerous. In fact, I would say it's one of Satan's favorite ways of ensnaring the Christian. Jesus tells us the day and the hour are unknown and we walk away ready to be awake and alert but then the time grows long and Satan begins his work. "Christ didn't come yesterday, nor today, and probably won't come tomorrow so live it up now and there will be time: time to repent, time to be sorrowful, time to be the kind of person Jesus wants." So we do whatever it is we desire to do, dropping the pedal of sin to the floor and what do we find out? "No one seems to have been hurt here, no one seems to care, I even went to church and no one knew and the lightning didn't crackle from heaven. I think I'm okay."

So we think until, Satan slowly carves away watchfulness and replaces it with the wretchedness of sin and guilt of it's despair. Police lights and insurance bills are nothing compared to the fires of hell and the cost of eternal damnation.

Oh, but now comes the trembling. As a sinner, I have the greatest difficulty with this sin of indifference. Why, the very nature of this sin is to lull me into a false security so that I am unaware as the trap snaps closed behind me. My sinful nature constantly drags me in this direction away from saving faith and the promised hope of heaven secured by that first coming: Christ's victories over Satan, the payment of the cross and the glory given to all in the Resurrection.

This is all true, so our Savior gives His church a task, in fact many of them. Now let's be clear as we begin to speak in this way, these tasks in themselves do nothing to earn or deserve God's forgiveness, good favor, or our place in heaven. God gives these tasks for a far different purpose. He expects each of us to be the watchman at the door, this we have already said earlier and it's that fact that makes indifference so insidious. But watchfulness will look different for each of the servants in the kingdom of God. For a child, it will be obedience to parents and teachers, for the single person, it will be obedience to the Sixth Commandment in thought, word and deed, for the couple, well the Sixth still applies but should God grant children now comes the task of training and nurturing in the Lord, and for the elderly it will be constantly putting trust in God and not the wisdom He has granted over the years and of course a million and one other and every different tasks as God should place them at our doors.

Yet, as we talk tasks we may still fail to see the purpose if not to earn or deserve something. Here comes the real beauty of vocation. For when we do what Christ assigns us, as Christ would have us do it, it will drive us to the Word of our God. It is this Word alone which first tells us

what God expects of us, sinners though we be, whatever stage of life we might find ourselves in. It is this Word which then tells us of Christ, who saves us from the sins we committed yesterday and today and probably will commit tomorrow as He lives according to the Law for us, pays the fine in our place, and shows us that death will yield to resurrection as we stand with Him forever in glory. Therefore, Christ continues with His parable, 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.*

Focused through faith on the Word, we stand ready. We stand with our eyes to the skies as many have said. Looking forward to, yes even longing for the day when our Savior will return. Living each day consumed not with the greed and covetousness of the world around us but with the only thing which will outlast this fleeting place, Christ Jesus.

As we wait we realize also that this power is not in us but in God alone. So we focus on the very means which God gives to keep us alert and ready. We remember the font with its grace and expectant hearts of faith which daily war with Satan given there. We touch and taste this forgiveness at the table in bread and wine which through the miraculous power of the Word are at the very same time Christ's body and blood, given for us and for our forgiveness. We meditate on Word, here corporately and at home privately, devouring it at every opportunity because here is the hope of heaven for a world of indifference.

And why do we do all of this? Not to earn anything, Christ already has. And it's because He has that for the Christian, unbelief is not an option. When Christ returns what will happen if we are found sleeping? No, as God works through His Word we will be found awake. Still Watching ... by God's grace, this is not a question of our moral compass but a statement of what we are through faith in Christ, until we stand with Him forever in heaven. Amen!