

“What I Say to You I Say to All: Keep Awake”

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
Decatur, Georgia

Season of Advent, HOPE Sunday, November 30, 2014

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Holy Scriptures: Mark 13:24-37 (NRSV)

The Coming of the Son of Man

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. **26** Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. **27** Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

28 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. **29** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he[a] is near, at the very gates. **30** Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Beware, keep alert;^b for you do not know when the time will come. **34** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. **35** Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, **36** or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Footnotes:

- a. Mark 13:29 Or *it*
- b. Mark 13:33 Other ancient authorities add *and pray*

The Day of the Lord

32 *“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the [Creator].”*

33 *Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.*

37 *And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”* –
Mark 13

Three years ago at dawn on Saturday, May 21, 2011, the star known as the Sun

shone her beauty and warmth and light on Mother Earth,

and another glorious day was begun.

Some were surprised to see the dawn of a new day,

for that was the date a radio preacher had predicted would be the Rapture.

I recall a conversation on the Friday before the predicted Rapture.

My brave hairstylist Tracey Howard was reflecting on Judgment Day.

Tracey came to her own conclusion:

she would put me down for an appointment in a couple months hence

or else, she said, *“I’ll just see you on the other side.”*

The day before on NPR’s *“Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me,”*
host Peter Sagal said,

*“This weekend it’s the scheduled time for the Rapture,
according to a prominent religious leader.
So if you find yourself listening to our show,
there are really just two possibilities.
Either none of us made the cut, or
...and I think this is more likely, this is Heaven.”*

The Day of the Lord

Well, my friends, here we are.

Being with you around the Lord’s Table is heavenly.

Rumors of our demise have been greatly exaggerated.

Good thing.

We’ve got work to do, families to raise and enjoy, fun to have,

music to sing and dance to, books to read, stories to
share, care to give,

vocations to be lived into and fulfilled for the
glory of God,

and a broken, fragmented world to bring
into wholeness

through the hope and grace of a
forgiving and loving Christ.

Let's get to it, staying awake and aware and in awe of the power of love.

Let's invest our energy in the positive.

The Day of the Lord

In the Gospel According to Mark

Jesus Christ preaches a powerful apocalyptic message,
drawing deeply upon the prophets and
apocalyptic imagery

that would have been familiar to his
Jewish listeners.

In the message before us from the thirteenth chapter,

Jesus quotes from the teachings of Isaiah, Joel and
Daniel.

He does so because He wants to “underscore the crisis

which impends when the Son of Man returns.” (p. 8)

Jesus speaks of the crisis and the hour yet to come

because He wants his followers to be watching,
waiting,

ever alert and aware and awake.

Do not be caught unprepared, He says,

like servants who do not know when their master will
return

and inspect their work and daily habits.

Jesus speaks of the coming of the Son of Man as a crisis.

Please, do not hear this as a dire warning nor as an empty threat.

He said to watch for the crisis, for the Day of the Lord, not to be afraid of it.

The Chinese written character that depicts Crisis

is the combined drawing of two signs: challenge and opportunity.

Each crisis that we encounter alone, afraid and isolated may make us feel

like we should freeze or fight or take flight.

Thanks to the Promise of God's love and presence

we are never alone, nor need we be afraid or in fear.

God is with you, as proven by the gift of Jesus Christ.

When we open ourselves to revel in the joy and hope that is found in Christ,

each crisis we face is both a challenge to be encountered

and an opportunity to live fully in the present,

to explore options for a hoped-for positive resolution.

This Word of Hope is for us personally and for us communally;

God's gift of Jesus was sent for the whole world,
not to condemn the world but that we might be
saved through Him.

These days of Advent are set aside as our liturgical season
for us to prepare, to be expectant, to be resolute, to
anticipate...

The Day of the Lord

Daniel Matthews served as rector of Trinity Church,
located in downtown Wall Street in NYC.

He tells a story about a house
in his grandson's suburban neighborhood.

Although the crèche in the yard remains empty until
Christmas morning

according to tradition,

the house and lawn are overrun with
decorations –

“lights and things on the roof and animals,”
Pastor Matthews says.

Stopping before the house one evening,

the 6-year-old grandson wondered

whether the neighbors couldn't afford a baby

Jesus

because they had spent so much on
decorations.

He and his grandfather wonder aloud,

“Do we really have anything left for Jesus?”

You see this 6-year-old and his grandfather understand the
meaning of Advent.

Wait. Watch. Prepare. Hope.

Advent is our spiritual season for anticipation and
preparation

of the One whose Promise comes to fruition in
Emmanuel: God with Us.

The Day of the Lord

“Watchfulness is necessary for at least two reasons.

First, there are false alarms from charlatans

who do not know what the real crisis is

and who do not know what the real time is.

They point to the wrong signs or to themselves

and their false prophecy threatens God’s people.”[\[1\]](#)

“Second, and more important, watchfulness is necessary

because only God knows what time it really is.” [2]

Jesus teaches his followers across the ages

that only the good Lord knows when will be the Day of the Lord.

Remember what He said?

32 *“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the [Creator].*

33 *Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.*

37 *And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”*

“The focus of Jesus’ teaching
is not for us to speculate as to why Jesus does not know
or what else might be hidden from Him.
The focus is that if such knowledge is held only by God...,
then we certainly will never ascertain this truth.” [3]

We are People of the Covenant.

The Lord shall be our Lord, and we shall be God’s people.

This covenant is grounded in love.

God loves you unconditionally,

and as a sign and seal of such unconditional love

sent to Earth the only begotten Son, born of
Mary in a manger.

God calls for you to return the allegiance with your life and
love.

Our relationship with the holy is founded on trust, on faith.
We need not worry or be anxious about God's timing.
We need only be alert and watchful; keep awake and grateful.

The Day of the Lord

Do not be misled.

There will be wars and rumors of wars, *yet do not be misled.*

There will be crises on religious fronts and in politics.

There will be economic and ecological crises,
as well as crises in society and in the human
condition.

Be not misled!

Remember the Promise.

Draw strength for today and tomorrow from the Promise.

Keep watch.

"We are to keep watch, [to *grhgorew*].

The word, *grhgorew*, is where we get the man's name Gregory.

Literally it means stay awake, watchfulness, being alert.

It does not denote an intellectual attitude,

a knowledge of facts concerning Christ's coming...

[It reflects] a moral quality of spiritual readiness for the Lord's return.

In other words, don't be a comatose Christian."[\[4\]](#)

Keep awake!

They say that a mother was seated on a bench in our church's Decatur Toy Park
when a small boy about five years old sat down near her.

He started winding what appeared to be a prized possession:
a Mickey Mouse watch.
“What a neat watch!” she said. “Does it tell you the time?”
“Of course not!” said the boy. “You gotta look at it.”

When it comes to your relationship with Jesus Christ in the here and now,
in between the Resurrection and His Return,
in between the Already and the Not Yet,
what are you and I going to do, to be, to share?
Jesus said for us to look at Him!
As Peter says, “Make your calling and election sure.” [5]

The Day of the Lord

calls us to be cognizant of
self-examination and self-fulfillment and self-sacrifice.

What was the difference between Noah and the rest of civilization?
What is the difference between the two in the field grinding grain?
What is the difference between sheep and goats,
between those who heed God’s Word and Will
and those who chose to ignore it?

Keep alert, watch, and practice the spiritual disciplines.
Jesus Christ did not say He was returning to the temple or church building
for those that are His.
He said He would return and come again
for those chosen and at work and play in their vocations.
Live daily into your calling to serve and sacrifice and support one another,
trusting in the Lord to lead you into each new day.

The Day of the Lord

For the past several months Christian Church and United Church of Christ
clergy and laity have been working side by side in Ferguson, Missouri.
Good and faithful Christians have walked the streets and sat down
with young people and shopkeepers and police officers
to build community and address the current crisis there.
Our partners in Christ have chosen to see the crisis
as a challenge and an opportunity for positive social change.
The core questions that haunt and hover over
all the talk, the protests and disruption, the fires and anger
were raised by teenagers who live in Ferguson.
The Revs. Ray and Wendy Miles are close to the situation there;
they testify that young people asked representatives
of the Church of Jesus Christ, in effect,
*“You are here now.
Where were you when our schools were overcrowded
and our job applications ignored?
You are here now.
Where will you be when this fuss has died down
and the next crisis erupts someplace else?”*

As Fred Craddock once shared in this significant pulpit
when speaking with us about the Final Judgment:

“God grades on a curve;

*the only question in the final exam is how do you love
your neighbor.”*

When Judgment Day comes,
we will not be judged on a final grade; we will be evaluated on a curve. What
are we doing every day in our world and city,
church and community and families to love our neighbor,
to build up and pay attention to the last, the least, and the lost?
What does it take us to wake up and be alert
to the real needs, real crises in our midst?

The Day of the Lord

Martin Luther was once asked
that if he knew Jesus was returning the next day what would he do today?
Martin Luther said, *“I’d plow a field.”*
There was nothing that he would do that was different.
Live every day in the light of God’s grace
which is sufficient for today,
and for tomorrow,
and for all the tomorrows yet to come,
until the Day of the Lord.

Whenever you fulfill whatever calling God has given you,
you are being watchful, alert, awake and ready.

This is what it means to live into a life of readiness.

Good thing.

Good thing.

We’ve got work to do, families to raise and enjoy, fun to have,

**music to sing and dance to, books to read, stories to
share, care to give,**

**vocations to be lived into and fulfilled for the
glory of God,**

and a broken, fragmented world to bring
into wholeness

through the hope and grace of a
forgiving and loving Christ.

Let's get to it,

staying awake and aware and in awe of the power of
Love.

Let's invest our energy in the positive,

living faithfully every day,

**because every single day
is the Day of the Lord.**

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*

[1] Texts for Preaching -- Year B, p. 9

[2] Ibid, P. 9.

[3] http://my.execpc.com/~crnrstn/sermons/sermons_1998

[4] http://my.execpc.com/~crnrstn/sermons/sermons_1998

[5] 2 Peter 1: 10