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Mark 13:32-37¹
Keep watching for the
Day of the LORD's return
1st Sunday in Advent
Supplementary Lectionary Series "B"
Gospels

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Grace WELS Durand MI
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Christmas Decorations
Sunday School Rehearsal

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 is 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!'"

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN

- I. BE AWAKE
- II. BE ALERT
- III. BE AWARE

In the Name of Jesus who is coming to judge the living and the dead, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

This Sunday is the First Sunday in the Church Year and is known as the First Sunday in Advent.

The term advent refers to a coming – to an arrival. As believers look forward to the coming of the celebration of Christmas – the birth of our Savior Jesus – believers even more excitedly look forward to Jesus' Second Coming in Judgment.

Jesus' Second Coming will not be like his first coming. Jesus' first coming was in humility. He was born in a barn in Bethlehem. Through circumcision, he was placed under the Law. King Herod unsuccessfully tried to kill him. He was raised in the despised town of Nazareth in Galilee. He lived the first part of his life in relative obscurity. When he began his earthly public ministry at the age of thirty, he served others both with miracles of healing and with the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness. He was betrayed. He died on a cross. He was buried. All of that speaks of Jesus' humiliation. Jesus' Second Coming will be in exaltation.

The second part of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed summarizes Jesus' exaltation.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.²

Jesus' first coming was to take away our sins. Jesus' Second Coming will be to take only those who believe in him to heaven, to live there with him in heaven forever. Therefore, our text both warns and encourages us: JESUS IS COMING AGAIN! JESUS IS COMING AGAIN ... I. BE AWAKE; II. BE ALERT; III. BE AWARE.

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN I. BE AWAKE

Jesus speaks a little parable in our text. He says that the owner of a house who goes away "tells the one at the door to keep watch" (13:34b). Jesus then adds, "you do not know when the owner of the house will come back" (13:35b). In order to illustrate his point, Jesus specifically says that the owner may come back "in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn" (13:35c). The times that Jesus mentions were parallel to the four watches of the night observed by the Romans: 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.; 9:00 p.m. to Midnight; Midnight to 3:00 a.m.; and, 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Whatever watch he might have, the Roman Soldier was expected to be awake and watchful. If he was caught sleeping, he would be executed.

If the Roman Soldier who was on one of those night watches was caught sleeping, he would be executed. The person who is not spiritually awake at Jesus' Second Coming will experience something worse than physical execution. He will be damned in hell forever. Moreover, the return of the LORD Jesus will not have advance announcement. Jesus says,

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" (13:32,33).

There will be no advance warning. Therefore, be awake and watchful at all times.

APPROPRIATION

² *Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee Wisconsin, Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), pp. 19, 41, 146, 150.

In these words, Jesus was speaking especially to his disciples. He emphasizes the fact that “the one at the door” is to “keep watch” (13:34c). Since these disciples were later to become the leaders among Jesus’ followers, he is emphasizing that they are “door keepers.” In the Old Testament, they were known as “watchmen” (cf. Ezekiel 2, 3, 4, etc.).

A “door keeper” is to be awake and keep watch. He is not to be guilty of spiritual slumber, but is continually to be at work in the Word of God. He is to use that Word of God to warn and to encourage the other members of the household, so that they too may be ready for Jesus’ Second Coming. He is not to be spiritually indifferent, taking Jesus’ warning of return in a light manner. All of this points to pastors especially. They are to be awake and watchful. They are to be at work in God’s Word. They are to warn and encourage the people of their respective spiritual households – their congregations. At the same time, Jesus broadens the application at the end of his parable.

At the end of his parable, Jesus says, “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (13:37). All of God’s household – all believers in Jesus – are to be awake and watchful. They are to be awake and watchful for themselves. They are to be awake and watchful out of concern for others, so that Judgment Day catches no one by surprise.

Jesus is coming again: Be Awake. Jesus is coming again: Be Alert.

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN II. BE ALERT

Jesus tells believers to be alert. He says, “It is 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” (13:34). The owner of the house who is going away gives authority to each of his individual slaves to do their assigned tasks – their assigned work. In the parable that Jesus speaks, those assigned tasks could be anything from foot-washing – the job of the menial and lowest slave – to carrying on the business of the household and estate – the job of the more talented slave. Each had their assigned tasks and were to carry out their assigned tasks. This was a reminder that the Twelve remembered when a problem arose following Jesus’ ascension into heaven.

Luke records in Acts Chapter Six,

6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from

among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

The “assigned task” of the Apostles was “the ministry of the Word” and prayer. The task of taking care of the bodily needs of the believers, although important, was not part of their assigned task. Others in the group of believers were assigned that task. All of them were to be alert to know and to fulfill their assigned tasks.

APPLICATION

Each of you also has an “assigned task” to which you are to be alert and which you are to strive to fulfill. This requires some analysis and evaluation on your part. One of the ways to proceed with that analysis and evaluation is to ask some basic questions: Are you male or female? Are you father or mother; grandfather or grandmother? Are you son or daughter? Are you employer or employee? Along with each of these categories or statuses, God gives job descriptions – he gives assigned tasks and responsibilities. The same analyses and evaluations are in place for the church, congregation and synod. Are you pastor or teacher or professor? Are you administrator? Are you elder or outreach chairman or board of properties? Are you altar guild? Be alert to your various responsibilities and assigned tasks. The problem arises, however, when we look at our assigned tasks and see how miserably we have failed at them.

Who can say that they have been the perfect and responsible parent or grandparent? Who can say that they have been the obedient, respectful and dutiful child? Who can say that they have worked faithfully for their employers; or, have been respectful and fair with their employees? Who can say that they have faithfully fulfilled their responsibility in church or circuit or conference, district or synod. And, if there are any who think they can boast about one thing or another, then be alert to the Apostle John’s warning,

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us.... ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar and his Word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:8,10).

None of us have fulfilled our responsibilities and statuses in a God-pleasing manner. We have not been alert to all of the opportunities God gives us to fulfill them. Instead, we have too often ignored, rejected and neglected our assigned tasks. We deserve Jesus to come suddenly and unexpectedly in condemnation. But, John adds these words of comfort, “If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God does this only through “the blood of Jesus, his Son” that purifies and cleanses us from all sin (cf. 1 John 1:7b).

It is only through faith in Jesus as our Savior that we can look forward with joy and anticipation to Jesus' Second Coming in Judgment on the Last Day. Moreover, we should be aware that the Last Day, Judgment Day, can come at any time.

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN III. BE AWARE

Again, Jesus says,

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.... ³⁵ Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back ... (13:32,33,35).

Be on guard! Be Alert! Watch! Be Aware! But aware of what?

In the verses preceding our text, Jesus had warned his disciples about signs that indicated that the Last Day, Judgment Day, was near. They were to be alert to these signs.

The imminent arrival of the Last Day would be signaled by natural upheavals such as earthquakes, floods, tornados, hurricanes, tsunamis. There would be man made disasters such as crime and wars; rumors of wars and civil unrest. All of these things would point to the nearness of the Last Day.

The signs of the imminent arrival of the Last Day included the fact that there would be false prophets arise who would mislead the people – lead them away from faith alone in Christ alone – lead them away from working daily at their assigned tasks. There would be false christis who passed themselves off as the real Savior and attempted to take over the souls of the people, going so far as to say that unless a person obeyed and submitted to them and to their authority, they could not be saved (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11; e.g. Roman Catholic Papacy).

Signs of the Last Day's arrival would include the persecution of believers in Jesus and families divided because of Jesus. Believers would even be subject to death and execution because they confessed Jesus as their LORD and Savior. Concerning all of these signs, Jesus said, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Be Aware! All of these things signal that the Last Day, Judgment Day is near. Be aware!

APPROPRIATION

Be Aware! Do not look only straight ahead but use also your peripheral vision – your spiritual peripheral vision. Be Aware!

Be Aware! Are there natural disasters occurring in these days? Be Aware! There are always incidents of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tornados, hurricanes and tsunamis.

Be Aware! Are there manmade disasters occurring today? Some of MSNBC's top stories on Friday included:

- Egyptian protesters stage 'last chance' freedom march; tens of thousands of protesters gather in Cairo's Tahrir Square ... for ... a massive demonstration to force Egypt's ruling military council to yield power [civil unrest].
- 'Numerous' reports of child torture by Syria; A U.N. human rights panel expressed alarm ... at reports ... of Syrian security forces torturing children [crime, heinous crime].
- Boy, 14, jailed for buying drugs on resort island [more crime].
- Six inmates nabbed after Hollywood-style escape [and more crime].
- AT&T braces for T-Mobile deal collapse [threats to financial security].
- Clashes shake Yemeni capital ... 2 dead [more civil unrest].
- A woman pepper sprayed shoppers in order to be first in line for black Friday [crime].
- Violence around the southern borders of the U.S. [war, crime, unrest].

In addition, there continues to be conflict in Afghanistan, Iran and other parts of the world.

Be Aware! Is there any need to mention all of the false prophets and churches that surround us and are in the world? Are there not groups, churches and pastors who soften the message of sinful behavior and condemnation? Any group or pastor or prophet that departs from God's Word in truth and purity, that questions the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, is a false church or false prophet. And, yes, Christians are still persecuted today.

Be Aware! Why do some in politics drop out or hide their heads when it comes to the church or church body to which they may belong? Because they want to be agreeable with as many people as possible and get elected. Moreover, there are some if not many areas of study in the academic world, that if you are known to be a Christian, you can forget about advancement or tenure. In addition, while we may not have experienced it too much yet in this country, there are places in the world where you can be executed, killed, for confessing Jesus as your Savior. It may happen here too! Be Aware!

Be Aware! Use your spiritual peripheral vision. Be Aware of what is going on around you. Be Aware! But do not panic. Do not lose heart. Do not fail in your trust and confession of Jesus. Rather, listen again to Jesus' comforting words: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Be Aware!

CONCLUSION

Judgment Day, the Last Day, is near. Jesus is coming again. This will happen soon and suddenly. Be Awake! Be Alert! Be Aware! Amen!