

Last Sunday of the Church Year  
November 25, 2018

Text: Mark 13:24-37

Theme: "Ready?"

"Ready or not, here I come!" This means the time for hiding is over and the time for seeking has begun. The hiders have been forewarned. If you are not hidden it's not going to happen. It's a pretty exact game. Hiders know before hand how far the seeker will count. From the cadence of the counting you get a good feel as to how long you have to hide. So, if you are not ready, who's to blame?

Deadlines do come in life, quite a few of them actually. Many of them are no mystery as to their arrival. You know when school assignments are due be that daily, weekly, or at the end of the term. We know when bills are due. These dates are not arbitrarily moved around each month to try to catch us overdue. And when it comes to taxes, what date is better know than April 15. If you pay your income taxes quarterly then there are three other 15s that come at no surprise.

There are other events that do come but the date is not known in detail. When will the next big earthquake be along the New Madrid fault? When will the population of Jonesboro reach 100,000? What day will be my last day on this earth? Absence of not having the exact date does not have to mean absence of readiness.

Today is the last Sunday in the church year. It's appearance is no surprise. It is from the church year calendar. It always comes at the same

time, not the same date, but the same time. That time is always the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Christmas Day. It's coming is never a surprise. The focus on this day is of another coming, that coming being our Lord's return as the judge of the living and the dead. He tells us He is coming again. He calls us to be ready, watchful, awake. But how do we bring this off? Does it have something to do with coffee, or a bullhorn, or even a microscope?

“Ready or not, here I come.” Well, the words of our Lord are more, “I am coming again, be ready!” Finding us or anyone won't be a problem when He comes. There will no place of hiding. Those who are ready are not interested in hiding anyway, just the opposite their cry has been, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Jesus has told His followers of His return. Of course He did this telling during His first arrival. The subject came up in the stone conversation that we were looking at last week.

Remember Jesus and His apostles are in Jerusalem. They have been here together before. But this time is different. This time His entrance did not escape notice as He was greeted by the crowds with their shouts of “hosanna.” He certainly didn't escape the notice of the Jewish leadership. They were really beside themselves as to how they could stop Him. So we see their failed attempts at doing so in the temple during the week. It was quite a week. As Jesus baffled those who tried to test and trap Him His disciples may have grown hopeful that the time was close at hand, the time they wanted to see, that time of enthronement and glory, glory not only for Jesus, but also for them.

Now as we getting late into that week we considered the amazement of the disciples at the magnificence of the Temple stones and buildings. Jesus gave them the sobering news that there would not be left one stone upon the other. This was one thing to happen, a big one as a temple has stood on this spot for 450 years. The Jews could not imagine such destruction. And Jesus spoke of something else, something bigger. “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” (vs 26)

There was a lot to happen before these happenings. There would be wars and rumors of wars. Nation would oppose nation, there would be earthquakes and famines. Jesus’ followers would be brought before councils, governors, and kings, families would be divided because of Jesus, the followers of Jesus would be hated, and there would be that abomination of desolation. More would be happening. The Gospel would be proclaimed to all nations. Then there would be tribulation as never before. The sun would be darkened, the moon would not give light, and even the stars would be falling. Wow, these would be things you just could not miss!

And Jesus tells them (and us), “be ready!” That warning occurs several times in our Mark 13: “But be on guard,” (v 23), “Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.” (v 33) “Stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come.” (v 35) “And what I say to you I say to you all: Watch.” (though the ESV has “Stay awake)

Jesus says there will be false alarms. “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name saying, ‘I am he!’” (vs 5, 6) “And then if anyone say to you, ‘Look here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.” (v 21) “For false christs and false prophets will perform signs and wonder, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.” (v 22) Now how does one stay awake? How is one ready? Is it a matter of stimulants? It’s going to be a long night so you take some 5 hour energy or drink a lot of coffee or dump your five hour energy in your coffee. Will that work? Is that a good alert? What would such spiritual coffee be? Could it be a heavy intake of Scripture selections like today’s, a dwelling on wars and rumors of war and unrest among nations? Perhaps you could also drink in some Daniel and Revelation, add a little Gog and Magog from Ezekiel as a creamer. What kind of alert is this? It make one more than a little jumpy and jittery, maybe not that equipped to serve.

You could use this to shock awake. You could sound the bullhorn of eschatology. It’s been done a lot over the centuries, not a few time in the US. In the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a man named William Miller stirred up a lot of folks only to later disappoint them. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> it was Charles Russell with the bullhorn of Jesus’ imminent arrival. Much disappointment but he made a lot of people jump. Near the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium there was quite an arousing or attempts to arouse through bullhorns of such men as Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, Tim Lahaye, and John Hagee. A lot of it is

around the relatively recent and quite questionable idea of the rapture of believers. How helpful has it been? Only God knows.

How effective is this sounding forth in making ready? Some of this alarmist teaching happens from watching the horizon through this (a microscope). Observing the times is seen as some sort of ballistics or DNA analysis in hopes of determining the day and the hour.

How ready does such alarming make one? It opens one's eyes for the moment, but it's hard to sustain. Actually such stimulants and alarms make for a tizzied tendency toward hindered judgment. You are just not quite sure what you are watching for and it leads to much speculation.

There is a much better way. It's not the coffee, and the bullhorn and the microscope. It's the water, the cushion, and the glasses. The best watchmen, the best drivers, and the best performers are hydrated, well fed, and rested. They have the eyesight to both look around and to look ahead. Such readiness does not come in fits and starts, but in a healthy lifestyle. It's not wise to put a sleepy, coffeed up sentry on duty and then give a blast of the alarm ever so often to keep him at the ready.

We are ready as we drink the waters of life and are refreshed with the rest of forgiveness and righteousness. We have these gifts because of Jesus' completed first coming. He went to Jerusalem to accomplish what the apostles did not understand and did not want. He was the long awaited and long prophesied One. He came to usher in God's kingdom. It was not a kingdom of this world. He did not come to host an ongoing banquet table on this earth, but to prepared an eternal banquet beyond compare.

The holy One of God, God the Holy One, takes all our unholiness upon Himself there at the cross, the intersection of heaven and earth. There the judgment of heaven against sin was received on earth by the One from heaven above. He did this so those who deserved to be in the depths of hell, might instead dwell with Him. Such is the promise and the certainty for those who look to Him in faith. In Him is the rest of forgiveness, no fear of condemnation. Those who fall asleep in Him awake to life with Him because He lives.

We are ready and alert as we have been given the sight through the Spirit to understand the times and understand the signs. We know the times. As Paul tells us the days are evil. The devil is on the prowl seeking someone to devour. Yet we know the victory has been won and is ours in Jesus. In our Lord Jesus service we redeem the times by doing the very things He puts before us to do through the lens of the Scripture to understand the signs. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.” (v 29) Yes, you know summer is near, you don’t know that it’s 3:15 pm on Wednesday, April 23. It is the season of the Lord’s return. We are in it.

Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (v 30) “These things” would be such things as wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, the gospel being taken out, persecution, false christs, and the Temple destruction. These things did

happen within the generation of our Lord and we have been in the season of our Lord's return ever since.

We drink the water of life, take the rest of forgiveness, have the divine sight our Lord gives us. We are refreshed and alert to watch, stay awake and serve. We are different servants but we have one Master. We don't all have the same tasks. Some of us are called to be watchmen—like apostles, and prophets, and pastors. We are all called to carry one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. We are to have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire, to others we show mercy with fear (Jude 1:22), the fear that of falling into their sin. It's the same thing Paul says in Galatians 6:1. We are all charged with declaring the praises of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

We are at the ready 24/7. Don't be deceived, or stop being deceived. It is not as though one can come in for a little water and bread and rest occasionally and go back out to life of caffeine and bullhorns, caffeine and bullhorns not about the kingdom at all. It's hard. It's difficult. It is beyond us, but not beyond our Lord. This "me" thing is powerful, that old sinful bent. We remember the water, the water of baptism, that we were buried with our Lord Jesus and raised with Him to walk in newness of life and we do so by the power of the Spirit given at that baptism.

Learn the parable of the household. We are all servants in that household, God's household. It's a nice house. The Master is a while in coming back. You could assume the time of return is always the same—

later. You could begin to do your own thing as do the other servants, as does the watchman. But the fun ends with the Master's return.

The Master has not left us clueless, far from it! He is still in communication by His Word. He is still with us at the meal—His meal. And then one day, something wonderful:

"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,<sup>36</sup> and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.<sup>37</sup> Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them." (<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:35**) For Jesus' sake. Amen