

## Sermon for Nov. 21, 2021

The end of the church year, end of the world

### Gospel Reading: The Coming of the Son of Man

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24 “But in those days, after <sup>t</sup>that tribulation, <sup>the</sup> sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and <sup>v</sup>the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see <sup>w</sup>the Son of Man coming in clouds <sup>x</sup>with great power and glory. 27 And then <sup>y</sup>he will send out the angels and <sup>z</sup>gather <sup>a</sup>his elect from <sup>b</sup>the four winds, from <sup>c</sup>the ends of the earth <sup>d</sup>to the ends of heaven.

28 “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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, <sup>e</sup>at the very gates. 30 <sup>f</sup>Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 <sup>g</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but <sup>h</sup>my words will not pass away.

#### No One Knows That Day or Hour

32 “But concerning that day or that hour, <sup>i</sup>no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, <sup>j</sup>nor the Son, <sup>k</sup>but only the Father. 33 <sup>l</sup>Be on guard, <sup>m</sup>keep awake.<sup>1</sup> For you do not know when the time will come. 34 <sup>n</sup>It is like a man <sup>o</sup>going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants<sup>2</sup> in charge, <sup>p</sup>each with his work, and commands <sup>q</sup>the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 <sup>r</sup>Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, <sup>s</sup>in the evening, or <sup>t</sup>at midnight, or <sup>u</sup>when the rooster crows,<sup>3</sup> or <sup>v</sup>in the morning— 36 lest <sup>w</sup>he come suddenly and <sup>x</sup>find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: <sup>y</sup>Stay awake.”

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Welcome to the Last Sunday of the Church year. Usually it is celebrated as Christ the King Sunday, but THIS year, the Lectionary is forgoing that emphasis and choosing rather to celebrate this day as the Last Sunday of the Church, with the focus more firmly on the Eschatological. That is, on Judgement Day and the end of all things. But not only the END but also the beginning of the Kingdom of God in all its glory and the reign of God with His people forever and ever AMEN.

The old is gone and the new has begun. We call that change. I’ve often quoted the systems analyst Bill Bridges in the past, and what he says about change... “It’s not the CHANGE that will do you in, it’s the *transition*.” And when Jesus is telling his disciples about the end times, and the great tribulation, that’s exactly what he is referring to... the signs of the TRANSITION from what is passing away to what is coming into place, when the OLD is not yet fully gone away, but the new thing is not fully established.

What Jesus tells his disciples is that in those days, the End Times, things will get really bad.

It will not simply be bad politics or bad government, wars, and rumors of war... but all of creation will begin to slide into chaos, earthquakes and storms, famine and such, but in this description, even the Heavens will shake, and the stars begin to fall. This is chaos on an unimaginable scale, like nothing we have ever seen in history... and history has seen some pretty messed up things.

But His encouraging word to us is for us to endure... hang in there... not give up... remain faithful, because when the new world is established we will like jewels in the crown. For us, those who endure to the end, the reward is redemption, resurrection and life everlasting in peace, tranquility and love. This is what waits for us in the kingdom to come.

And then he cautions us to remain awake and take notice of the signs. We are living in the transition, the END TIMES, and we have been since Christ ascended into heaven. And so we will continue to do so, until the day of his return, and his coming with the clouds. When we see the signs of decay in the world, the signs that the system is corrupted and running down, we must not be afraid, but be reminded of what we have been told. I think the Gospel Singer Jim Reeves put it well.

*This world is not my home, I'm just passing through  
My treasures are laid up, Somewhere beyond the blue  
The Angels beckon me, From Heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home, In this world anymore...*

Our Gospel Lesson today ends with these words. "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. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Stay awake, eyes open, be alert, on guard... check yourself... pay attention... to what?

The coming of the Kingdom of heaven.

It's a present, active IMPERATIVE. DO THIS... it's more than good advice, it's a command from on high. It is prescriptive. It is for your benefit, your health and life. The idea is maintenance.

But it's not just set it and forget it... You need to be checking in, doing your rounds.

This applies to individual Christians. We are accountable to maintain our faith.

Living things grow and move and do things. We try to stay healthy so that we are able to grow and move and do things.

But it also applies to congregations. We are also accountable as a church body to maintain our health and fitness as an organization. To grow and move and do things in the service of God's kingdom.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche lamented about Christian growth, saying that “If Christians wanted others to believe in their redeemer, then perhaps they ought to present themselves as having been redeemed.”

Redemption is having been delivered out of death. I’ve been keeping tabs on the Kyle Rittenhouse trial. On Friday they read out his verdict after three days of deliberation. I can only imagine the stress of waiting so long to hear your fate being read out by 12 strangers.

My heart went out to him as the verdict was read. Even though the judge had already said that the verdict would be the same for all five counts against him, it was still nerve wracking to hear each count and the verdict, “Not Guilty,” being rendered. On the first count his demeanor did not seem to change. By the reading of the third count you could see his body begin to shake. On the fourth his shoulders began to heave as the emotion was unable to be checked. On the fifth count he collapsed in weakness, barely able to breathe. He had been set free from his burden and he wept.

These were tears, I think, not of joy or of sorrow, but of release. Joy would follow, but for the moment, he was merely relieved that he had not been condemned. It was humbling. And it changed everything.

When he could at last stand again, nothing would ever be the same. He was redeemed. It was a good kind of sadness that he felt in that moment. It was a mercy that would not leave him the young man that he had been.

Leaving the politics of the day aside, my heart was also relieved, because there but for the grace of God go I and so many of us. In my sin before God, I stand accused. The difference is that I am guilty of all of it. But what God has done is paid the price. I am not declared “not guilty.” And I’m not declared “innocent” but I have been declared “set free,” because Jesus has taken the penalty for my sins away. What does that good news do to me? Am I changed by it? Are you?

Because if we are, we can have a new life and a new attitude toward the life we have *now*. And our response is to live better than we might, because humility takes away our anger and bitterness. We can be joy filled and hopeful, even in a world that is in terrible tribulation. We begin to see the sins of sin and decay and see them for what they are... And know that they will not last. They must pass away and come to an end when the Kingdom of God arrives in glory. That Day is not long in coming. As I say... we will also see it in our lifetime because judgement day is coming for all of us sooner or later. And so we pray, Thy Kingdom come.

In the meantime... we watch, we keep awake and on guard. And we maintain, and we grow.

We grow in spirit and we might also grow in size. If we look at human bodies, we can see that a body grows in many ways. It grows bigger... it also matures... it grows in wisdom and knowledge... It grows in spirit and emotion... skills and strength. Congregations also do this.

Just as a body can grow larger without getting healthier... eating the wrong foods, not doing enough work or activities to be healthy or maintain health... Congregations also need to maintain themselves in the same way: Eating healthy, exercising, working out... doing mission, being of purpose and use in Christ's kingdom.

Part of our VISION PLAN, our Watching Plan, The OPEN EYES PLAN (VISION meaning to look and see and watch... and DO) will require our being Christ's redeemed people. And acting like it in ways that serve Christendom... the Kingdom of Heaven.

It's the end of the church year. And as we look forward to the new year, we listen to Christ's command to watch... attend... pay attention... not only to our own individual faith but to his mission as well.