

November 21, 2021
Last Sunday of the Church Year

“Awake, Not Drowsy”

Jude 20-25, Mark 13:24-37

In the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod we have a church year that celebrates special Sundays, seasons, feasts and festivals and today marks the last Sunday in that calendar, and the readings for today always reflect the day of judgement. It makes sense. The first Sunday on the calendar begins Advent highlighting the first appearance of Christ so today should highlight His final coming on the Last Day. So let's go ahead and talk about the end of the world.

Are you concerned about the Last Day? It's amazing how the answer to this question runs the gamut in the Christian church today. Some Christians and churches are hyper-focused on it, trying to map out the signs from the book of Revelation according to current events to figure out how close we are to the Last day, or maybe the unscriptural idea of a “rapture” followed by seven years of trouble, then a thousand years of bliss, then finally the Last Day. Things get really strange with that. I think every single president since the day I was born has been the antichrist according to somebody. Okay, maybe not Gerald Ford; but everybody else, yes.

At the other end of the spectrum you have Christians who couldn't really give a hoot. Some know they're saved so think they don't have to care. Others think the world isn't so bad and it's going to get a lot worse before the end, so it can't be coming soon. Others are just so into the world that things like the return of Christ just aren't on their radar.

Both ideas are kind of weird in light of what Jesus, the king who is going to return, says about that day: *“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”*

Jesus most certainly says we should be cognizant of and prepared for His glorious return. “Stay awake” is a command that one be alert and ready. But the little parable Jesus tells also indicates that being awake means to be a good servant doing that which He has left one to do. It doesn't mean obsessing over the signs, day and time of the return of the master; it means to keep living as He has instructed so you won't be found lacking whenever He happens to come back. And that return may be very soon.

You may remember that last week I mentioned the possibility of the world getting a lot worse before the return of Jesus. Maybe. Like I said, Holy Scripture in places does seem to indicate things will get real bad before the end. But aren't they getting pretty bad now? Aren't His people, His Word, His church suffering both persecution and corruption in the extreme?

That prediction of Jesus, *“In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken,”* all that was fulfilled in a manner at the death of Christ and at that time the disciples did indeed see the resurrected Son of Man in glory and power, both in His atoning crucifixion and His victorious resurrection. When you look at all that has happened with Christ and is happening with His church throughout history down to this very day, it's really

tough not to say “*He is near, at the very gates.*” So yeah, not that we have to obsess over it, but certainly, stay awake.

That said, what is of paramount importance is not when the day is coming, even Jesus Himself didn’t know that. What is of paramount importance may be how you regard the coming of that day; are you fearful or hopeful?

We have these words from Jude: “*But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*”

“*Waiting on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ*” is the manner in which a Christian should be staying awake in this life. We recognize this world and life is evil and broken and the return of Christ is mercy, saving us not only from the sorrow and trouble inherent here, but freeing us from the sinful nature that plagues us here and keeps us from loving and serving God in perfect joy as we ought. Christ’s return is a good, good thing—the best of all possibilities!

Yet people, even Christian people, can have a real problem with this. We love a lot of stuff of this world. The sinful stuff, sure, that’s a challenge. But I hope each day we take up our cross, battle temptation, repent of our failures, seek and receive Christ’s forgiveness. But what I’m really talking about here is the good stuff—family and friends, vocations and careers, leisure and entertainment—all the good gifts of the world God showers upon us.

We can come to treasure these so much that when we think of Jesus’ second coming, we’re not filled with hope for His arrival, but instead with fear of the loss of the world it brings! This should not be! Such fear is a warning that you may be loving the world too much; that you should repent and refresh your mind in the truth of the paradise Christ is bringing.

We moan and gripe about old age, but I think this is a place where it is very much a blessing. If most of this life is in your rear-view mirror and your body aches and is failing it seems easier to look forward to release into Christ’s bosom. You’d think, but truth be told I’ve dealt with some pretty old Christians who were pretty scared of leaving this life. But you get what I’m saying.

With younger folks though, this is a problem. We all know most crazy teenagers think they’re going to live forever. Just look at some of the dumb things they do on Tik Tok. But a lot of that doesn’t go away as people grow older. We’ve got dreams, plans and ambitions for this life. The end of the world????!!! We don’t want to think about it—that would mess up our future! In some way our spirit doesn’t want Jesus to come back, not because we fear the judgment for sin, but because we love this life too much! And despite what I said earlier, this problem can plague us even beyond our nineties.

You know what that being obsessed with this life is people? That’s getting drowsy! That’s Jesus saying stay awake but letting the love of the world tug on your eyelids.

The solution? Jesus. Jesus is the caffeine of salvation! His Word is your wake-up call. His Sacraments and the forgiveness they convey are the reminder of how merciful He is today, and how wonderful the eternal mercy He brings to completion on the Last Day will be forever.

To our earth-bound sensibilities this Word can be kind of harsh and bitter; “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*” That’s tough. But we know it’s true, and hearing it wakes us up to the truth. More often it’s sweet: “*Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’*” We know that’s true too. All of it is true, and it reminds

us that Christ's kingdom is not of this world that is passing away, but is for those who love Him and are saved by His mercy at His reappearing.

So stay awake. Today may indeed be the end of the world, and that is very, very good news. It means Jesus, the one who created us, redeemed us and ultimately gives us a perfectly blissful life with Him forever is coming for you, not in wrath, but in mercy and love.

Amen.