

Sermon for December 3, 2023 – Advent 1

Mark 13:32-37 (EHV)

Theme: **Servants of Christ: Keep watch.**

- 1) By doing the work he has given you to do.
- 2) By expecting his return at any moment.

<sup>32</sup>“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. <sup>36</sup>If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup>What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”

Picture the scene: a mother tells her children: “I am going to run a few errands this afternoon. While I am gone, I want you to straighten up the house. John, it’s your turn to clean the bathroom. Michael, pick up the playroom. Tanya, clean the kitchen. If you all do a good job by the time I return, we’ll make tonight a movie night. If not, there will be consequences.” The children answer: “OK, Mom.” What do you imagine happens after the mother leaves? Do the children get to work right away or waste time playing games and watching TV?

Jesus offers a similar illustration in our sermon text and applies it to us. He, our faithful God and Saviour, ascended into heaven to prepare a wonderful place for us. Before leaving, he gave his followers duties to carry out before he returns. Will you be faithful in carrying them out? Let Jesus' gracious warning encourage you to do so, under the theme: **Servants of Christ: Keep watch** 1) By doing the work he has given you to do. 2) By expecting his return at any moment.

Part One: By doing the work he has given you to do.

Our sermon text is part of the instruction concerning the end of the world that Jesus gave his disciples on the Tuesday before his crucifixion. After telling his disciples about the signs that would precede Judgment Day, he says:

<sup>32</sup>“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Now, wait a second: doesn’t Jesus, as true God, know everything? Yes, he does. How, then, could he say that even “the Son” does not know the hour of his return? Remember that Jesus spoke these words in his state of humiliation: when he was not making full use of his divine knowledge and power so that he could live as a human in our place and win our salvation. The fact that Jesus kept

this knowledge from himself shows that we should not attempt to try to figure out exactly when the last day will be, but be prepared for it when it happens, as Jesus says:

<sup>33</sup>*Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.*

In our short sermon text, Jesus uses three different Greek words for “watch” – two of which are found in the verse I just read. “*Watch*” carries the idea of giving careful attention. “*Be alert*” has the idea of being awake and vigilant – expecting something to happen at any moment. I don’t know how Jesus could be any more emphatic. He wants us to be constantly looking, always hoping that today (yes, this very hour!) might very well be our last on this sin-cursed earth! Instead of wasting time trying to figure out when he is returning, let us simply be ready for it. How? Jesus says:

<sup>34</sup>*It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch.*

The man is Jesus, his house is the Church, and we (who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins) are his servants. Where our English Bible says: “*he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do,*” the original text literally states that the man “*gave his servants the authority – each for his work.*”

This “giving of authority” reminds me of what Jesus did after his resurrection when *he breathed on* [his disciples] *and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*<sup>i</sup> Just ten days after his ascension, Jesus affirmed this authority by pouring the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. Every Christian has been called to be Christ’s representative in the world. We all have the blessed privilege of telling those who repent of their sins that they are forgiven and warning those who refuse to repent.

But our text also says that the man *assigned what each one was to do*. Just as the entire crew of an aircraft carrier carries out a single mission and yet each person on that ship has their unique task they have been trained and assigned to do, so also, even though we – the church – have the singular mission of sharing the Gospel, each one of us has been uniquely gifted and called to perform specific tasks in support of that mission. St. Paul puts it this way: <sup>4</sup>*For we have many members in one body, and not all the members have the same function. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us. If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. <sup>8</sup>If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully.*<sup>ii</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ: The Holy Spirit has uniquely gifted each of us for individual duties so that we, the church, might faithfully carry out its mission. So, let me ask you: what is the special and unique way God has gifted you to contribute to the Church’s mission? Are you a young mother – entrusted with children whom the LORD wants you to nurture with his word? Are you an elderly person shut in at home with lots of time to pray? Do you have the know-how to help with a project

at Church? Are you filled with compassion? Are you good at encouraging? If you struggle to figure out what gifts God has given you, talk to me; maybe I can help you figure them out.

When talking about the gifts God has given us in the church, the Apostle Paul also adds: *I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you.*<sup>iii</sup> In other words, we must be careful not to pursue tasks for which we aren't gifted but like to think we are. On top of that, God doesn't want us merely to do the things we want to do. He wants us to carry out the tasks He assigns us. This is why soberly evaluating your gifts with people God has already assigned in those tasks is important.

So, my question for you is this: Are you faithfully carrying out the tasks God has given you in various aspects of your life as a parent, child, employer, or employee? Do you live your life remembering that you're God's servant on assignment, or do you live your life as if it's your own to do with whatever you please? Remember what the Bible says: *You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body.*<sup>iv</sup>

Sadly, we often forget that we are the Lord's servants, don't we? It is so easy to live for ourselves – doing what we want instead of what God has prepared and assigned us to do. We are often like children who, instead of immediately doing what their mother told them to do, continue to play or do something else for Mommy that Mommy didn't tell us to do. What will happen to those children when their mother comes home and catches them not doing what they should be doing? What will happen if the Lord sees us not doing what he asked?

This should lead us to cry: “Lord, forgive me for not doing what you want me to do – for living for myself instead of your glory. Remind me of your grace, how you willingly left your home in heaven to live, suffer and die for me. It is only because of your work for me that I can call myself not only your servant but also your dearly loved son or daughter. Thank you, Lord, for paying the debt I owe. In the peace of your forgiveness, help me live to your glory – being the faithful servant you want me to be and doing my part to glorify your name in all the world.”

Part Two: By expecting his return at any moment.

Jesus continues: <sup>35</sup>*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning.*

At the beginning of my sermon, I mentioned that Jesus uses three different words in our text related to the idea of watching. Now, at the end of our text, Jesus uses the same “watch” word three times (a word which literally means “Stay awake”) to emphasize our need always to be ready for Christ's return. This leads to my next point: notice that all the possible times Jesus mentions the master might return occur during the night. The point is clear: Christ will return when people are spiritually sleepy and least expect it, so be prepared.

Do you want to know how you can prepare for Christ's return? I will tell you: Begin every morning with prayer, recalling God's love and blessings, asking for his help for that new day. End each

day in prayer, thanking God for his blessings, asking him to forgive all sins and keep you safe at night. Eat your meals, thanking God for his providence. Do your job like you are working for Christ. Love your spouse. Love your family. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ, and when you look at your enemies, remember Jesus died for them also and love them as Christ loves you. Take time every day to read a portion of the Bible or a devotion. At the very least, take some time to meditate on Jesus' saving love for you. Be ready to answer those who ask about your hope in Christ, but do so with gentleness and respect. It is easy to prepare for Christ's return. And do you want to know something else? Even though the devil tries to convince us otherwise, living in preparedness for Christ is more joyful than indulging in sin and spiritual laziness.

Our text continues: <sup>36</sup>*If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.* What is the sleeping to which Jesus refers? It is the sleep of returning to sinful self-centeredness, living for yourself instead of Christ – working to build your dreams and life instead of Christ's kingdom.

Now, we all sin and, on occasion inadvertently serve ourselves rather than Christ. This is more like “dozing off” and not the “sleeping” Jesus refers to in our text. When such dozing odd happens and you realize it, go to the cross in repentance, trusting Jesus will forgive you. However, the “sleeping” Jesus mentions in our text is prolonged and continued selfishness to which our “dozing off” can lead if we are not careful. It is best not to doze off, but if we do, let us wash our sleepiness away with the cold water of remembering who God declared us to be at our baptism: his dearly loved, forgiven children in Christ.

And so, Jesus says: <sup>37</sup>*What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!*”

In other words, be diligent in your faith by doing the things God wants you to do – expecting his return at any moment. Remember your baptism, meditate on your Bible, and partake of the Lord's Supper to grow in your faith in God's saving grace. Persistently share the Gospel through your words and actions because every day that passes is a day closer to Christ's return. Don't let this day catch you unawares but watch for it – always clothed in Christ's righteousness through faith in him. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> John 20:22-23 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Romans 12:4-8 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 12:3 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 EHV