

“My Words Will Not Pass Away”

Mark 13:24-37

I mentioned last week that in the early part of Advent, we get a carryover from the end of the church year with the theme of Jesus' return on the Last Day. What we hear in our Gospel reading today is part of Jesus' answer to the disciple's question: “when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” Like most people, the disciples were interested in knowing when all this is going to come to an end. Walking around the Temple in Jerusalem and marveling at the massive stones and magnificent buildings, Jesus told them there would come a day when not one stone will be left upon another.

Again, it is important to remember that, in answering their question about when this would happen, Jesus really answers two questions because the destruction of Jerusalem will not be the destruction of the world. He tells them of the destruction of Jerusalem which will happen in 70 AD. And He says, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” And the destruction of Jerusalem will be a foretaste of what is to come.

“But concerning that (last) day or that (last) hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Jesus has yielded the authority to determine the time of the end of the world to His Father in heaven. He alone has set that date. So if anyone tells you that

they have inside information or received a prophetic vision of when that will happen, that is pretty much the definition of blasphemy – making yourself equal to God.

Throughout this month of November, beginning with All Saints' Day, we have been focusing our attention on the End Times, the Second Coming of Christ, and our relationship to the saints in heaven who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

Like the disciples, like most people throughout the ages, we tend to be interested in looking for the signs of the end. “When will these things be?” Only the Father knows. So Jesus says, “Be on guard . . . stay awake.” Be alert. The image is of a watchman at the door. The Master has given you responsibility. When the doorkeeper fails, everyone is put in danger. If I fail in faithfully executing my duties as a pastor, I could bring destruction upon hundreds of people by leading you astray, driving you away from the love and mercy of God, or changing the Gospel so that it is no longer the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But it is not just pastors; this is true of anyone who has authority is the “doorkeeper” for someone else. We do not know when the Master will return. Looking at all the things Jesus says about when He will come, the picture is pretty clear that this is something that requires our constant attention. He says He will come “when we least expect it.” He says that it will be like the coming of the flood in the days of Noah. Right up to the time of the flood, everyone was going about doing their daily business, planting the fields, planning for weddings. That is how it will be on the last day.

Some bride or groom will be just about to say “I do” when Jesus comes and the wedding is stopped. Or, shall we say, a different kind of

wedding feast is just about to start – The wedding feast of Christ and His bride the church. The ongoing Feast, the eternal Feast, the Feast which has no end of which we get a foretaste of this in the broken body and shed blood of Christ our Lord.

Jesus says, “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.” Staying awake all night just sitting and watching is not easy to do. And the farther into the night you sit and watch for the Master to come, the harder it gets and the more tempted you are to not stay focused on the task He has given you.

That is another aspect of what Jesus speaks of elsewhere concerning the end. He never says remaining faithful to the end will be easy. He says that the path to heaven is the narrow way. “The narrow gate you must go through. The broad and easy road leads to destruction.” “The world will hate you on account of the name of Jesus Christ.” “Anyone who loves his life in this world will lose it.”

I could just keep quoting Jesus for the rest of my sermon – which would not be a bad thing. We can never hear too much of the Word of God. But the point of all of this, and the point that Jesus makes over and over again throughout His ministry, is that His message is very different than anything else you will hear in this world.

The image of the end of time with the sun and the moon being darkened, stars falling out of the sky, it can be frightening. It is meant to be frightening. All this is going to pass away. “Heaven and earth will pass away.” There is only thing in this life that you will take with you into the resurrection. Jesus says, “My words will not pass away.”

God's Word of promise is eternal. It is unchangeable. It is truth. Our Post-modern world doesn't like the concept of truth. Then again, Jesus' message, the Gospel, is very different than anything else you will hear in this world.

At first reading, it seems like Jesus' words to the disciples about the coming of the end times is a lot of scary Law. And there is some scary Law in there. Then again, the Law of God is always scary, because "the Law always condemns." As the saying goes, it doesn't only condemn but is always condemns.

But then you hear that eternal truth, "My words will not pass away." Do you have any idea what you have received in Baptism, or Holy Communion, or in the proclamation of Scripture? Almighty God speaks to you. The Word of God, the Word made flesh joined with water causes you to be "washed in the blood of the Lamb"; the Words of Institution joined with the bread and wine bring about a miracle as Christ our Lord comes to us in His body and blood; the words of Absolution spoken to you in which you are to hear them as if they were spoken by Christ Himself – all of this is for you to have forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ.

The earth will pass away. Even heaven as it is currently constituted will pass away. This body will pass away (unless Christ returns first, and even then it will be made new). But His words will not pass away. Cherish that Word of promise that the Son of God has covered your sin and guaranteed your resurrection. Be on guard and stay awake. The Advent of our King is upon us. The Master is coming soon. Amen.