

Mark 13:26-37

²⁶Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.

²⁸“Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors! ³⁰Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³²“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It 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. ³⁵Therefore 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. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”

The End?

I.

It's the end. The end of a project. Many hands played a part in the projects that have been completed in the recent past of Holy Trinity. It wasn't just the most obvious one that we celebrated with the rededication at the beginning of this morning's service, or the new additions to our worship space.

There were recent playground additions and a sound system in the gym. The electrical panel for the whole facility was changed. The boilers and the whole heating system was revamped and updated. Hallways and bathrooms and gym were repainted and freshened up. There are things that I am leaving out, because there has been a lot of updating and improving around Holy Trinity recently.

But is it really the end? Really, today is just a transition into another beginning. The team that spearheaded so many changes continues to work. The picture of the gym floor that will be installed shortly is on an easel in the narthex. Under discussion are more things. What are the next priorities? The end simply means that we go back to the beginning.

It's the end. The end of the church year.

The church year starts of with Jesus' life. In Advent we anticipated the birth of our Savior. At Christmas we rejoiced at his birth. Then we transitioned to Epiphany, where we witnessed Jesus showing himself as the Savior of the world. During Lent we remembered with both sorrow and joy that our Savior willingly gave himself as the sacrifice our sins deserved. Throughout the eight weeks of the Easter season we rejoiced again and again at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Then came the non-festival half of the church year when we looked at the many aspects of the Christian life. Today, the church year is all over.

But is it really the end? It's more of a transition. Next Sunday the whole cycle begins again. We will wait again for Jesus' birth and watch as he carries out the plan of salvation all over again. It's thrilling to watch through the whole process. It's a highlight of liturgical

worship. Again and again we thrill in the glory of everything God has done for us.

Again and again in this reading you heard Jesus say: “Watch!” Four times he uses the word, but he implies it even more often. The end is near, he is reminding us. The Last Day, Judgment Day, is coming. Because we have gone through the cycle of the church year time after time we know that whenever that day does come, we will be ready. We will be ready because year after year the cycle is repeated that tells us the great Good News of what our Savior God has done for us.

II.

While we watch, we wait.

The context for today’s Gospel is Holy Week, when Jesus was teaching his disciples just before he completed God’s plan of salvation. He has talked to them about the signs that the end of the world was getting closer. On Reformation Sunday we heard as he spoke earlier in this very chapter about a list of things that signal that the end is coming: wars and rumors of wars; nation against nation; famines, earthquakes, persecution of Christians.

In today’s Gospel Jesus says: “Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors! ³⁰Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen” (Mark 13:28-30, EHV).

The signs Jesus spoke of are all there. They are *always* there. Generation after generation has seen horrible things happening in the world. But because we are steeped in the cycle and recycle of the church year, we have a joyful anticipation of what is coming.

Jesus says: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come” (Mark 13:32-33, EHV). Stay dialed in to your faith. Faith is not something to be put on a shelf until one day when you are older and closer to the time you have to face death. Jesus spoke about the persecution of Christians in that list of signs earlier in the chapter. Persecution is a reason to watch and pray all the more fervently, not a reason to abandon your faith.

III.

“Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26, EHV).

What a moment of great joy that will be!

It will only be a moment of great joy because of what has already been. Jesus was actually looking *ahead* to the reason his return will be a moment of great joy for his believers.

As mentioned before, Jesus was teaching his disciples during Holy Week. He was about to complete God’s greatest plan. Soon the disciples would witness the horrors of his trials. They would see him being unjustly accused before Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. They would see the beatings he endured. They would walk along with the sad procession that took him to the Place of the Skull, where he was nailed to his cross and it was lifted high as his intense agony continued.

They would hear him cry out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34, EHV) when God the Father abandoned God the Son to suffer all the horrors of hell in our place. They would witness him telling the world that God’s plan had been completed and sin was paid in full when he cried out: “It is finished!” (John 19:30, EHV).

They would be gathered together on Easter Evening and a week later when Jesus

appeared before them behind locked doors and told them unequivocally that he had risen from the dead. Jesus would tell them they were to be his witnesses, telling the world about what Jesus had done for all, and then ascend into heaven before their very eyes. Angels appeared and said to the disciples: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11, EHV).

Perhaps they thought of Jesus’ words to them even before he died: “Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky” (Mark 13:26-27, EHV).

No one knows what day or hour when Jesus will return. He told us as much in this very Gospel. But we *do* know this: it will be a day filled with wonder and great joy for us. The One who has gone into heaven to prepare a mansion for each one of his believers will come back in great power and glory. He will gather believers from every part of the earth, both those still alive on that day, as well as those who have died before then. Each believer will be taken bodily to our eternal home.

IV.

But now is not yet the time. I can tell you that for certain, because right at this moment we are still here in a worship service, not standing gazing up into the skies as the Lord Jesus comes with great power and glory.

So, “Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It 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” (Mark 13:33-34, EHV).

It’s not the end...yet. So, back to the beginning. Since you are still alive you have a part to play as the Last Day approaches. What’s your part?

There are some parts that are very visible as you look around at a congregation of believers. Some run the livestream each week. Some usher. Some make sure the screen is displaying the correct part of the service. Some play instruments or use their voices to sing in choirs. Some build buildings, or remodel them. Some plan and discuss things that need to be done. Some participate in various events.

Other parts are not quite as visible. Your gifts to support these various projects are important. Just as important as those gifts—more important, really—are the gifts that support the ongoing ministry of this and other congregations. If the gospel is not being proclaimed, the building is useless. Your prayers are important, too. Pray for those who make it their vocation to preach and teach the message about Jesus; pray for those who are struggling with their faith; pray for those who have fallen away, that they might return to their Savior; pray for those who have not yet heard the message, that they would come in contact with the pure Word of God and be saved.

While you’re at it, don’t step away from an active part in proclaiming the gospel to others. Jesus said: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mark 13:31, EHV). You heard about what God has done for the world from others. The answer to some of your prayers that others might learn of Jesus is yourself. In many cases, *you* are the one who is most likely to be heard or seen by your friends and family as you bear witness to what the Savior has done for you.

We’ve come to the end. To the end of phase one of our building project, to the end of a church year, to the end of a sermon.

But we're really just at the beginning. Not of the sermon, but on to a new phase of planning for and carrying out ministry here at Holy Trinity, and at the beginning of a new church year.

Give thanks to God as you wait and watch for Jesus' return. Give thanks that you can wonder in all that he has done for your salvation, and that he will return again for you one day. Give thanks to God for the endless opportunities you have to hear the Good News about Jesus and for the work that he has given you to share that Good News with others. Amen.