

First Sunday in Advent “B”

December 3, 2017

St. Mark 13:32-37

It’s Good to Know What You Don’t Know

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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

If you think you know something and you don’t, this can lead to trouble. I have melted enough screwdriver ends in my life to realize I know nothing about working with electricity. Some coaches think they know their game. Then they make moves that lead to frequent defeat and then being fired. So called Bible scholars claim they know when Jesus is coming back to earth. This results in no small amount of pointless calculation and useless charts. Better to admit what you do not know.

Advent combines preparation for Jesus’ first coming in grace with readiness to welcome Jesus when he comes again in judgment. Old Testament believers did not know when the Messiah would come. We do not know when Jesus will come again. In both cases, it’s good to know what you don’t know. Then, the Christian always is prepared; is always ready. That readiness is repentance.

It’s Good to Know What you Don’t Know. No one knows about that day or hour. That lack of knowledge leads to constant vigilance.

Our Savior’s words are part of his discourses on the Tuesday of what we call “Holy Week.” Jesus just finished teaching about the signs of the end of time. The Son of Man will come on the clouds. He will gather his church from the four winds. Heaven and earth will pass away even as his eternal Word continues. When would that happen? “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

God the Father has reserved this knowledge for himself. He has not told the angels. Even Jesus in his humiliation was not privy to the information. Certainly no human being knows. It’s good to know we don’t know. Now we understand and see the need to heed Jesus’ exhortations, “Be on guard. Be alert. Keep watch.” All those actions involve keeping our eyes open and looking out for something that is coming. It requires not falling asleep. Jesus repeats the reason for repentant readiness, “You do not know when that time will come.”

The people awaiting the first advent were to keep watch. “Lift up your heads, O you gates, be lifted up you everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-he is the King of glory.”

Psalm 24:10. We keep watch during Advent in preparation to celebrate that coming of the King of glory into the world in Bethlehem.

More directly we must stay spiritually awake and alert and watchful for our Lord's imminent return. This is good. Were we to know when we would die, or when Jesus is going to return and the world end, well, it does no good to speculate. This is not for our good so God has hidden those dates from us. It is a sin against the Second Commandment to seek to know the future. Rather, that lack of knowledge leads us to constant vigilance and preparedness of repentance.

Jesus used a short parable to reinforce his message that it's good to know what you don't know so you act in a way that is beneficial. You don't stick a metal screwdriver into a plugged in lamp. You make coaching moves you know will help. You don't claim to be able to pinpoint the date of the last day.

Jesus paints a picture of the church and the church's watchmen waiting for the Second Advent. The master of the house left for an unknown period. He assigned his servants tasks to carry out knowing he would be back but not when. The owner place his watchman at the door who would keep a look out for the owners return. It could be anytime during the watches of the night.

Our Lord and Savior is the owner of the house. He has left us servants busy with our assigned tasks. We are his witnesses to the whole world. We go to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching. We offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. This is our spiritual act of worship. We work together in the Christian church and in our synod and in our congregations serving in our varied vocations using our gifts for the common good.

Now is not the time for spiritual sleep. Jesus lovingly warns, "If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping." The if means since. Jesus is going to return suddenly without immediate advance notice. We know Jesus is coming. No surprise there. How do we stay awake and alert for the unknown when? The Apostle Paul gives us the answer in Romans 13:11, "So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light....Let us behave decently as in the daytime...Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

We are like those first disciples at Jesus' Ascension. We are looking up to see Jesus come back the way they saw him ascend. Our readiness is repentance. We acknowledge our sins and believe in Jesus. He came the first time in grace to be our Substitute under the law and under God's wrath. He will come again in glory to judge the living and dead. Public ministers are the watchmen at the gate who keep us ready.

We do not want our returning Savior to find us asleep at the switch, unprepared. So we preach the Word of Christ and administer the means of grace. We use God's Word to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness. We watch over the flock of the Good Shepherd and pray for your safety.

It's good to know what you don't know; the day or the hour. That lack of knowledge leads to constant vigilance. We're on guard. We're alert. We're watching. Jesus promised, "'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." [Rev. 22:21] Amen. <SDG>