

The First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Mark 13:32-37³² *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!"*

Are you familiar with the movie Captain America? Perhaps you are more familiar with the Marvel comic book series, which began in March 1941. The original setting for the comic book as well as the movie was during the days of World War II, and as it opens, we met the main character, Steve Rogers, attempting to serve his country by joining the Army. Even though he was not able to serve because of health issues, he constantly felt the call to service, as everywhere he looked he saw posters of Uncle Sam pointing at him and declaring, "I want you!" So strongly did Steve Rogers feel the call to service that he tried enlisting in the army on five different occasions; he felt compelled to serve because he knew that Uncle Sam needed and wanted him. Well, in our lesson today, our Savior is doing the exact same thing. Though he may not be appearing on a poster and pointing his finger directly at us, he is telling us exactly what he wants of each and every one of us. For as we take a look at our lesson in Mark 13, we will hear our Savior speaking with great urgency and declaring that he wants each and every one of us to be alert Christians. He wants each and every one of us to be responsible Christians. He wants each and every one of us to be expectant Christians. Jesus this morning urges to remember that:

Advent Calls You . . .

- to be alert
- to be responsible
- to be confident

Take a look at what Jesus is telling us in Mark 13, beginning with verse 32: He says, *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.*

Now, I have to admit that these words seem more like a warning for the season of End Time than words of preparation for the first Sunday of Advent, but in either case, the message is clear. In either case, as Christians, our Savior wants to be alert as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ's birth as well as the day when he will return. For just as no one knew exactly when Jesus would be born, no one knows the day or the hour when he will return, and if we are not ready, we will be caught off guard and miss out on our salvation all together.

That's what happened to Colonel Johann Rall, commander of the Hessian forces, during the Revolutionary War. For during the war, a loyalist spy appeared at the Hessian headquarters carrying an urgent message for the Colonel. The message stated that General George Washington and his Continental army had secretly crossed the Delaware River that morning and were advancing on Trenton, New Jersey where the Hessians were encamped. The spy, however, was denied an audience with the commander and instead wrote his message on a piece of paper. A porter took the note to the Hessian colonel, but because Rall was involved in a poker game he stuffed the unread note into his pocket. When the guards at the Hessian camp began firing their muskets in a futile attempt to stop Washington's army, Rall was still playing cards. Without time to organize, the Hessian army was captured.

Because Colonel Rall ignored the message the spy had brought him and was not alert to the possibility of attack on the day after Christmas, he lost an important battle and the Hessian army eventually lost the war as well. The same thing is true for you and me, if we are not alert Christians, as our Savior wants us to be, we will not be prepared for his return. Then, when we hear the blast of the trumpet, we will find it that is too late to prepare ourselves for our Savior's coming. Thus, our Savior says to us today: "I want you to be alert Christians so that you are ready for my return. However, until I do return, I want you to be responsible Christians. I want you to continue in the duties, which I have given you.

Yes, because we do not know when the end will be, our Savior wants to find us responsibly carrying out the tasks, which he himself assigned to us. In fact, as he speaks in our text, he explains it to us in a way that illustrates the situation in which we are living today. For Jesus tells us, ³⁴ *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.*

There can be no doubt that this is the time in which we are living. For today we are living in a time when our Master has returned to his Father's side in heaven. We are living in a time when our Savior wants us to be diligently waiting at the door watching for his return. We are living in a time where it is extremely important for us to be responsible Christians as Christ wants us to be. For even though our Savior is away from us in the body, we know that one day he will return just as he has promised, and until that time he has given each of us a special assignment to carry out while he is away. Though we all have been given different gifts, our Savior wants us to use those gifts as we responsibly carry out the duties ascribed to us in our station of life. As Luther writes in his table of duties: Are you a husband or wife? Then love each other faithfully as Christ loved you. Are you a Father or a Mother? Then bring your children up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Are you a Son or a Daughter? Then obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right! Are you an Employer or Employee? Then serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord. Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and do not treat your workers with contempt, but with the same respect that you deserve. Are you a Christian? Then love your neighbor as yourself.

These are the responsibilities our Savior wants us to carry out while we are awaiting his return. For just as he came once as a little child, born in a stable at Bethlehem, we know that he will return one day just as he has promised. But since we do not know when that day will be, our Savior wants us not only to faithfully carry out our responsibilities, but also to live in the expectation of what is to come.

Though we do not know the day or the hour when our Savior will return, we know that he will return one day, just as he has promised. We know that he will return one day just as he has told us, and this is why we need to live lives expecting his return. This, in fact, is the very point that Jesus himself was seeking to get across when he said, ³⁵ *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.* ³⁶ *If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.* ³⁷ *What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!"*

Watching is exactly what we as Christians have been doing since the day that Christ ascended into heaven. For throughout the centuries, Christians have eagerly expected the return of their Lord and Savior. They have anticipated his return as they lived through the dark days of World Wars. They have anticipated his return at momentous events in history as one millennium became another. But today, we are all the more expectant of his return because of the great evil in the world. Today we as Christians not only expect our Savior's return, but we also find ourselves craning necks as we look into the sky wondering if today will be the day. We find ourselves hoping that this will be the day when we hear the reverberating blast of the trumpet call of God and know that all our expectant waiting has paid off.

Advent calls us to be confident because Jesus assures us that he will return on the Last Day. Our confidence comes and grows and strengthens us as we focus on our Savior. All the things in daily life which dull our alertness and degrade our responsibility are overcome as we focus on him. Look in the manger and see your salvation. The manger points ahead to the sufferings of our Savior. The manger points ahead to the empty tomb. The manger points ahead to his ascension to his Father's side. The manger points ahead to his glorious return on Judgment Day. The manger points ahead to our eternal life in his glorious presence. Through him, the God-man, who came once to save us and who promises his second coming, we have every bit of confidence. Jesus keeps his promises! What else do we need to have God-pleasing confidence?

Though it's very seldom that we see the picture of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and telling us that he wants us to join up, our Savior today through these words does that very thing as he calls us to ready ourselves for the day of his return. So, today we can do just that! Listen to the call of our Savior who wants us to be alert, responsible and confident Christians as we look forward to the day when he will return.