

Mark 13:24–37

“Allures, Alerts, Assures”

Last Sunday of the Church Year B

May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and Redeemer. Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this Last Sunday of the Church Year is the Gospel Lesson, Mark 13:24-37. I'll be reading that text throughout the sermon this morning.

A middle-aged man was in the hospital to have his appendix removed. It was a simple surgery, yet the man was worried that something might go wrong, and this would be the last day of his life. Just before he was to be wheeled back to the operating room, the man gathered his wife, daughter, and two sons around his bedside. “In case this is my last day on earth,” said the man, “Bernie, I want you to have the Beverly Hills houses. Sybil, take the apartments over in Los Angeles Plaza. Bobby, I want you to take the offices over in City Center. And Jennifer, my dear wife, please take all the residential buildings downtown.” With that the man squeezed their hands and was wheeled off to surgery. One of the nurses hung back to talk to the man's wife. Amazed at overhearing all this, the nurse said to the man's wife, “Your husband must be such a hardworking man to have accumulated all that property to give out to all of you if this is his last day.” The wife chuckled and said, “Property? No, my husband has a paper route!” The Last Day is our topic this morning.

Today, on this the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we are reminded that Judgment Day is approaching, when we will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus is coming again to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the kingdom of heaven. The one who created the world, who redeemed and restored the world by his death and resurrection, is coming back, as we confess in the creeds, to judge the living and the dead in perfect justice.

It's been two thousand years since Jesus promised to return. That makes it seem highly unlikely to people today, including churchgoing Christians, that he's ever going to come back. But our text today gives a very vivid picture. Jesus promises to return in visible glory and with great power. When he returns, all will know that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who lived two thousand years ago, died on the cross, was buried, and rose again, is Lord over all, the very Son of God, the Messiah. He took on human flesh, carried out a public three-year ministry, was crucified to pay for our sin, was bodily raised from the dead, exalted over all things, and, yes, one day will return for all to see. That's our focus on this Last Sunday, and it's an intriguing topic. The promise of Jesus' second coming allures, alerts, and assures us.

In our text, Jesus puts it all into perspective. The created world is temporary. Its days, like our own, are numbered. Everywhere we look, we're reminded that this world is temporary. Gray hairs, weak knees, muscle pulls, bones creaking. Machines break. Toys fall apart. The computer locks up. Sometimes we wonder if we'll ever make it through the day.

Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem for what would be our Lord's last Passover. In the verses before our text, as they left the temple, the disciples looked around admiring its grandeur. The temple was a beautiful and magnificent architectural achievement. The Jews took great pride in it. It stood as the central place of worship for the Jews to bring their sacrifices and offer prayers to God. Here God made his dwelling with his people.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach his disciples about the end times. He made the disturbing comment that in the not-too-distant future not one of those buildings would be intact and not one of the giant stones would be on top of another. The disciples were naturally upset about that, so they asked when that would happen. Jesus then told them about the destruction of Jerusalem, and he took this teachable moment a step further. He pointed the disciples ahead to the times and things that would happen right before the Last Day.

The end of the world always has a certain allure. We're curious about it, and Jesus' disciples are no different. They want to know when: When is all this going to take place? What will happen? That's still what fascinates people most about the end times. Why have Judgment Day and the end of the world as we know it always been such attention-grabbers? To the world, they represent dramatic action and a cataclysmic battle between good and evil that simply must be seen, and of course, scripted into a multimillion-dollar book series or movie. To believers, Judgment Day and the end of the world are the fulfillment of the promises of God centered in Jesus, the joyful end when we finally fall into the arms of a waiting Savior, who won the victory over sin, Satan, and death. It's the end we've been promised.

To both a world that thirsts to be entertained, and believers who hunger to spend eternity with God, Judgment Day and the end of the world seem so far into the future and so foggy with unclear interpretation that any little detail is as valuable as a road sign when you're lost. There are some things about Judgment Day we know. In a flash, all people will be gathered before Jesus, including those who have died, their bodies raised up to rejoin their souls. But there are some things about Judgment Day we don't know, especially when it will happen.

Throughout history, there have been a whole host of folks who have predicted when the end of the world would take place. But the fact is that these folks have been totally and terribly wrong in their predictions. What does Jesus say? He tells us, "Don't believe them." The way he puts it in verse 32 of our text: "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven." If you hear someone predict when the end of the world will be, you automatically know they're wrong. Only God knows when. So, while we don't know when the Last Day will come, Jesus does give us some insight.

We know we must always be on the alert for Jesus' return. He says in verses 33-34 of our text, "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake." Jesus wants us to be alert, on guard, to keep watching for him to come at any time. He underscores this with the illustration of a man who leaves home and places his servants in charge while he's away. Jesus is the "man," the Church is the "house," and we believers are the "servants." The

point Jesus makes with this picture is that we in the Church are to “be on guard,” as he says, for his return at any moment.

The first-century Christians believed Jesus would return during their lifetime. They lived in that hope and expectation. They kept waiting and watching and longing for his appearing.

The message to us today in this twenty-first century is the same as it was to those in the first century: you don’t know when he will return, so always keep ready. Jesus says in Luke 21:34: “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”

The Lord Jesus told his followers what they could understand, and he does the same for us. For us Christians, life is full of trouble every day precisely because we are Christians. But we can understand what Jesus says in Matthew 24:13 too: “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” We don’t walk on this troubled road alone. Jesus walks with us as we watch and wait. The Holy Spirit empowers his redeemed to make a witness before those who hate and persecute them. They will be given words of proclamation for those who persecute and punish them, murder and martyr them. You can endure to the end because Jesus lived, died, and rose for you.

Are we paying attention to the signs of the last days? Are we going along with the current, or fighting the good fight of faith? In our Epistle Lesson, Jude directs us to be built up in the most holy faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus and the promise of eternal life. Jesus is coming! And when he does, you’ll see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. In the end, it’s all about Jesus, who’s the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

For those in the faith, we who trust in Christ alone, this is not terrifying at all. It’s wonderfully reassuring. We await his coming with joy because he assures us, he comes with life, with light, with forgiveness and hope, and he comes to put sin and death in their eternal places, once and for all. He comes to raise you up, to live bodily with Him forever.

Be built up. Be assured by his words. And stay ready for the Day of the Lord by making those words of the Lord the foundation of your life. Your Lord Jesus has daily comfort, daily promises, daily gifts and blessings to pour into your life as he cares for you with his Word and Sacraments and calls you to a new and glorious life with him. Verse 31 of our text says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

The Word of the Lord endures forever so that we can endure until the end. So, put on the armor of God. As you have been forgiven, so forgive. As you are loved by God, so share that love with others. As he serves and cares for you, so serve and care for others. As you have received the Good News of salvation in Jesus, so share it with others that they, too, may know him and be with their Savior in the mansions he has prepared in Paradise. As you are comforted, give comfort. Live as believers who already have eternal life, because you do.

On May 19, 1780, the sky over Hartford, Connecticut, darkened so quickly and

ominously that some of the members of the Connecticut legislature, glancing out the windows, actually feared the end of the world was at hand. They clamored, of course, for immediate adjournment of their legislative session. The speaker of the council, Colonel Abraham Davenport, quieted the disruption when he rose and said to the assembly, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought."

The end of this world, according to the Bible, is imminent. Though we don't know when that will be, Jesus will return on the Last Day. So what should we be doing now? 1 Thessalonians 5 says we should "Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak... Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." As we await Jesus' return, we still have work to do, that our Lord has called us to do. We focus on serving our neighbor as we pray that our Lord Jesus would come soon, and we know He will come soon.

The Day of the Lord is coming. The signs are all around us. We're living in the last days. The world has been living in the last days since Jesus ascended into heaven about 2,000 years ago. It's not easy for you, as a believer, to live in the last days. But don't be afraid. Jesus will soon come again in righteous judgment to take you and all believers in him to be with him at his side. Until then, he's at your side. His coming may be sudden, but its certainty calls us to a life of joyful expectation. Be reassured by his coming! Live as believers who long for the day of his appearing. Pray that day will be here sooner rather than later, the day when there will be no more headaches and heartaches, fears and tears, troubles or trials, strife and sorrow, no pandemics, just God's grace in fullest measure, eternal life. The Lord's desire for you is that his return would not be a day of terror for you, but a day of triumph in him.

The one who is coming has come so we might live. The babe of Bethlehem became the Good Friday Savior and the Easter hope for the whole world. As Christians, we live in him now by faith, and on that Last Day we will be with him forever in our bodies! That's good news for us and for all who believe. With faith in Jesus, there is forgiveness for all our sins. There is hope when things seem hopeless. There is life after death. There is eternity with our Savior and our believing loved ones. With Jesus, we are more than conquerors. That's why Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. So, we're not just allured by Jesus' coming on the Last Day. We rejoice to also be alert, and assured. Jesus is coming!

We close with words from our Epistle Lesson, Jude verse 24-25: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

And now may the peace which passes all understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.