

WATCH ACTIVELY
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

MARK 13:24-37
NOV. 30, 2014

²⁴ “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for 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— ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

On Thanksgiving Day, two groups of people watched football.

Some were sitting in stands, some in easy chairs,
sometimes they jumped up or shouted,
but all were relatively passive spectators compared to
other group of watchers wearing striped shirts,
running back and forth, blowing whistles, throwing flags.

For referees, watching is more active than passive.

Jesus, in text, calls us to active watching,
not just being spiritual couch potatoes
like worthless watchdog who just watches
strangers come into our house,
but like attentive parent for whom watching children
is more than just passive watching.

So, what is it we are to be watching for?

WATCH ACTIVELY FOR WORK IN GOD’S SERVICE
WATCH ACTIVELY TO KEEP WHAT GOD GIVES US
WATCH ACTIVELY AS GOD COMES TO GATHER US

WATCH ACTIVELY FOR WORK IN GOD’S SERVICE

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Starting today, Advent wreaths help count weeks to Christmas.

For some time may seem to go slow, nothing to do about it.

For others it goes too fast because of so much to do.

Couple of weeks ago we heard parable of talents,
reminding us we are God’s stewards, caretakers.

Everything we have is for use in his service.

This parable reminds he gives us not just things but jobs.

Wherever & whoever we are, & as long as we are here,

God has something for us to do.

It may seem some things we do just to benefit ourselves,

and we do it in a way that suites ourselves,

like cooking, cleaning, doing homework, exercising,

but everything we do, we do as God’s children,

so we watch selves that we live in way that honors him.

But we are here as servants not just to benefit ourselves.

Everything we do has an effect on others.

We are not alone in this household of our master.

So whatever job we are assigned, we watch for

how God wants us to show his love & care to others.

One example Jesus gives is doorkeeper.

His job is not just to bolt door and board up windows

but to watch for others who need to come in.

We are surrounded by others needing to be in God’s house.

We live on a busy road on a stormy night.

We are kept in God’s safety in dangerous world,

but this does not mean we can just sleep soundly.

We need to stay awake and be ready to go out

to rescue those at our doorstep, in our neighborhood

who need God’s rescue before it is too late.

So we keep busy in this season,

glorifying God & reaching out to bring in others

and we don’t do it lackadaisically because not just time

but everything else will someday be gone.

WATCH ACTIVELY TO KEEP WHAT GOD GIVES US

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As we look ahead, next Sun. is Dec. 7, reminder to look back 73 years to 1941, to “a day that will live in infamy” the Sunday Pearl Harbor was bombed, US entered WWII.

On day no one seemed to expect, but in retrospect everyone should have been expecting.

Text is at end of conversation Jesus has with disciples about coming destruction of Jerusalem which was just as astonishing for them.

Every generation seems to have own experience with sudden destruction, horrific loss.

These are signs, reminders, even greater destruction is coming. This entire creation will pass away.

Jesus uses example of how fig tree shows summer coming.

He is referring to harvest which we think of before winter.

In that part of world, crops grow in rainy winter season

& coming of summer means harvest, gathering in crops

Especially here, harvest needs to be safely gathered in before winter storms begin

which everyone knows will come, but hard to say when.

Bible uses harvest as picture of last day

when God’s people will be gathered in to heaven.

But meanwhile, we must watch for sneak attacks from enemy.

As enemies of ancient Israel swooped in to steal harvest,

Satan watches for opportunity to attack us

all the more as we approach our eternal safety.

We have to watch on one hand for temptations in darkness,

going along with things without noticing where they lead,

or knowing we are doing wrong but thinking

we are in the dark where no one will know.

Temptations, esp. in this season, to waste time or resources
on things that are unimportant or don't last.
We have to watch on the other hand for false security
of self righteousness, thinking we are good enough.
and other false teachings that point us to wrong savior.
And we need to watch at same time, whenever
any kind of troubles slow us down or trip us up
for Satan to take advantage of opportunity to attack us
with discouragement, feelings of defeat, despair,
to steal our hope, confidence in God's love.
Jesus says these things not to frighten us but to encourage us
that no matter what surprises us, he knows it ahead of time.
And no matter what passes away and is taken away.
His words will never pass away.
When we store them up in our hearts his truth about life
and his promises of forgiveness and eternal life
we are ready for any storm and attack
without losing our precious treasure of Jesus.
This is why we are eager to..

WATCH ACTIVELY AS GOD COMES TO GATHER US

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and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from
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will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.
²⁷And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the
four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Last week were people actively watching and waiting in night.
They were in line for stores to open for black Friday sale.
Many were uncertain of getting what they wanted or not.
We, however, watch and wait with certainty.
We are not just counting days and waiting until Christmas
but waiting for Christ's return to gather us into heaven.
But meanwhile we watch actively as he comes to us already.
One sign of his coming is sun being darkened
and everything being shaken.
This has happened already once when Jesus died on cross.
He has come already, not in great power & glory
but in great humility and love
To suffer and die in our place

The stars have already been seen falling from heaven
as Satan & evil angels are defeated & cast down by Jesus.
So that before the final harvest when his angels
separate out the wheat and burn the weeds
His Holy Spirit has gathered us into his church
by his word which burns in our hearts.
So that we are separated from our sins
by repentance and forgiveness.
He calls us to stay awake & keep eyes & ears open to his word,
actively searching it for his instructions to us as servants
and for signs of his grace and mercy.
Already now he tells us to expect and watch for his coming to us
in Holy Communion where he gives us his own body & blood
as a foretaste of the banquet he hosts for us in heaven.
He also comes to us today in surprising, unexpected ways,
through fellow believers who encourage or comfort us
and through other people who need help from us,
opening our eyes to God's blessings to & through us.
As Paul writes in today's epistle to Corinthians,
"you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for
the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you
to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is why we don't just watch things go by
like a Thanksgiving Day parade
while we sit in our pajamas and feed our faces.
but we are up and alert, dressed and ready, as we
WATCH ACTIVELY FOR WORK IN GOD'S SERVICE
using the resources and jobs God has given us
as his servants to open door for others into his house.
WATCH ACTIVELY TO KEEP WHAT GOD GIVES US
not letting the sneak attacks of the devil steal away
the harvest of mature faith & eternal blessings.
WATCH ACTIVELY AS GOD COMES TO GATHER US
around the cross of Jesus where we see his grace & glory
by gathering us around his word and sacraments
in his home, the church, which he keeps secure
even as everything else shakes & falls
and which we wait for him to gather into heaven forever.