

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Last Sunday of the Church Year - Proper 29B
November 24, 2024
Mark 13:32-37

Stay Awake!

[Jesus said,] "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." (Mark 13:34-37 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Waiting is not something we generally like to do. Thus we have microwave ovens so we can cook faster. We have "fast food" restaurants galore. We have instant coffee, instant oatmeal, instant potatoes, and minute rice. We get anxious when the response time on the computer is not as fast as we wish. We get impatient when we are caught behind someone driving slower than we want to go. We often shop from home because we don't want to stand in line, but even then we have to wait for it to be delivered. You know how waiting can increase frustration, irritation, anger, and impatience. Yes, we live in a time where it is very hard to wait - for anything.

Especially if we are waiting for something good, something we want. We become impatient and maybe irritable, because we want what we want and we want it now. When the time does finally arrive, there's relief, and maybe some happiness. And while we get what we were waiting for, sometimes the waiting takes a little of the luster off.

And if we are waiting for something bad, waiting can be just as hard. Waiting for a diagnosis or the results of a test can be very difficult. And if you did something you might be punished for, that waiting can be hard too. "Wait 'til your father gets home," can cause great dread and fear in a child. And when that time comes, we are often afraid of what we will actually receive.

And then there's the waiting for something we do not know for sure. As police, firefighters, other first responders, and emergency room personnel wait, ready and prepared for whatever, always hoping they're not really needed.

Yet, as the dearly beloved of God, we must wait, and we know what for. Though all of our sins are forgiven and we have the promise of eternal life, we must wait to experience that life in its fullness. And that waiting is often difficult. We don't want to wait, especially if we are suffering any kind of affliction. We want that perfect life, that relief, and we want it now. Yet, our Lord has seen fit to have us wait. And while we wait, He wants us to stay awake and alert. He wants us to watch and pray.

He wanted the same thing for His disciples. A short time before Jesus was arrested and taken away from them, Jesus tells Peter, James, and John to "watch and pray." And we know what happened to them. They fell asleep. They weren't able to stay awake and keep watch and pray for even a short time.

Then, of course, Jesus died. He had said that He would rise on the third day, but the disciples hadn't understood what that meant. So there they were, hiding behind closed doors, when Jesus appears. The waiting had been unbearable as they waited for the Jewish leaders to come after them. But, oh, the joy that was theirs when their beloved Lord appeared before them and assured them that He truly was alive was unbelievable. His word had been fulfilled.

Later, at Jesus' ascension, the disciples, and all God's people, begin the wait for His promised return in glory and judgement. And that's where we are today, on this last Sunday in the Church Year. We are God's beloved children and the sheep of His pasture. We eagerly await His glorious reappearing so we will realize the fulfillment of eternal life with Him.

Until that time, however, we have to wait. And that isn't easy. When we suffer illness or disease, when we suffer the death of a loved one, when we suffer loss of job or income, when relationships are strained or broken, whenever we suffer anything we think is bad, we too pray for our Lord's return. We don't like to wait because it's never easy.

Yet, we don't wait idly. Rather we "watch and pray." We do whatever we can to "build ourselves up in our most holy faith and pray in the Spirit" (Jude 20). And the way we do that is through the faithful use of the means of grace God has given to us. For it is through God's Word and Sacraments that we are built up in saving faith. As we attend to the preaching of His Word and as we receive our Lord's very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins, we are being built up in the one true faith.

Yet, none of us does this perfectly. How often have we, for example, refused to partake of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, paying more attention to ourselves than to the Words and precious Gift of Christ, our Lord and Savior? Or, how often have we in fact received this Body and Blood of Christ at His Altar, but without repentance and without giving heed to its significance; going our way as though His Sacrifice should make no difference in our dealings with others?

How often have we despised God's Word and the preaching of it by going to Church grudgingly or with reluctance? Or not going at all? Or by our sleepiness and lack of attention? By tuning out the Divine Service and thinking instead of Sunday brunch, or the pot roast in the oven, or the football game, or what so-n-so is wearing, or the next big job to do at work, or plans for the next family gathering? By neglecting opportunities for worship and Bible study? By our failure to pray each day, evening and morning, before and after meals? Indeed, none of us keeps watch as he should.

But Jesus did. He kept the perfect watch which led to His being nailed to the cross for our sins, including our inattentiveness. It was our stripes and punishment that He received, when He was wounded for our transgressions and died in our place. It was your sins and mine that took Him to the Cross on that Day and in that Hour. Through His sacrifice we have forgiveness for all our sins, even the sins of being less than watchful and prayerful.

Indeed, He was always watching, always alert, always in prayer. His focus at all times was on the good and gracious will of His Father. He lived His life and went to His death as we must, by faith alone, trusting His Father always. And as with His prayer in the Garden (while His disciples were sleeping), Jesus always entrusted Himself entirely to the purposes of God, willingly taking the Cup of His Judgment.

In Him the necessary watchfulness, as well as the Final Judgment, have already been fulfilled and satisfied for us. He allowed Himself to suffer hell itself as He was separated from God. He suffered the full extent of God's wrath against the sins of the entire world (the sins of all people everywhere, from Adam and Eve to the end of time, from those who have died to those yet unborn). He lived perfectly the life that we could not - of perfect faith; of fear, love, and trust in God above all things; of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; of constant attention to the Word and promises of God.

The watchfulness to which we are still called on a daily basis - a readiness to bear the Cross of Christ in our lives, as a living out of our Baptism - is thus made possible by Christ, Who prepares us (by His watchfulness) through His Word of forgiveness. He thereby removes what we were, and give us Himself to be what He is.

Thus we are still exhorted to stay awake, to watch, to be alert, and to pray, that we might cling to our only hope in Christ, hear and receive His many gifts of forgiveness and life and salvation, and rejoice all our days in His merciful presence.

And where our watchfulness and service are always so weak and pathetic, our Lord's watchfulness and His Divine Service are ever trustworthy and certain. He continues to prepare us by His Word of Absolution, by His preaching of the Holy Gospel. He has already satisfied the

Final Judgment, and in the waters of our Baptism He has granted us eternal life by His Cross and Resurrection. So as you wait for His return in glory and judgement, stay awake and remember this:

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. (Jude 24-25)

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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