

Daily Discipleship

First Sunday of Advent (B) – Mark 13:24-37

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Hopeful*

Focus Question: *What are you waiting for this Advent season?*

word of life

“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” Mark 13:33 (NRSV)

Read Mark 13:24-37

This chapter of Mark is known as the “Little Apocalypse” – a miniature revelation of the second coming of the Christ. Many of the familiar elements of “the day of the Lord” from the Old Testament are present in these verses:

Nature will exhibit signs that the end is near (verses 24-25)

The Son of Man first described in Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7) will come in the clouds (vs. 26)

The chosen elect will be gathered (vs. 27)

All this will happen “after that suffering” (vs. 24). These words proclaim the promise of God’s deliverance to an infant church undergoing persecution. The reality of suffering will not last forever. The present hurt is endured in the promise of a future hope.

1. *What images come to mind when you think of the Second Coming of Christ?*
2. *How are these images troubling?*
3. *How are they comforting?*

What is the attitude of a faithful disciple to be? The answer: hopeful watching and waiting. Two illustrations from these verses make the point. When a tree buds, it is obvious that summer is coming (vs. 28). In the same way, faithful disciples are called to be hope-filled – to look for signs of God’s presence, even in the midst of suffering. We are to be vigilant, as a brief parable of a servant anticipating the owner’s return (vs. 35-36) reminds us.

4. *What other illustrations might Jesus have used to demonstrate his point?*

The Greek word used for “watching” is used twice in Mark’s Gospel – here and in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus admonishes the disciples to watch (Mark 14:32-39) while he prays. The disciples fall asleep, only to awaken to Jesus’ arrest and coming suffering.

5. *What makes it so difficult to watch and wait?*

The parable in Mark 13 introduces what is about to happen in the next chapter. The various times mentioned correlate with the events of Jesus’ passion: evening (the last supper); midnight (the garden and arrest of Jesus); cockcrow (Peter’s denial); and in the morning (the trial, and ultimately the resurrection). God’s salvation is near, but it comes in unexpected ways. The challenge to disciples of every age is to be vigilant and hopeful, continually anticipating and watching for God to come.

6. *What does it mean for you to be vigilant and hopeful?*

word among us

It's something we hate to do. It's something most of us don't do well but which we all end up doing more than we care to admit. That "something" is "waiting." Think of the many examples of waiting in our daily lives. We stand in line at the post office, waiting for the next available clerk. The voice on the other end of the phone line says, "Thanks for calling; can you hold, please?" A student in the school hallway runs to catch up with friends, shouting, "Wait for me!" The host at the restaurant tells the hungry customer there will be a twenty-minute wait for a table. We sit in the "waiting room" of the doctor's office. A child on Santa's lap tells him, "I can't wait 'til Christmas!"

1. *What other examples of waiting come to mind?*

Whether we care to admit it in this instant-gratification, drive-thru-window, two-minute-oatmeal, microwaveable, instant-credit-approval society, we are a waiting people. The same can be said of disciples of Jesus; and no other season in the church year is more filled with the theme of waiting than Advent. "Beware; keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come." (Mark 13:33 NRSV)

It is true, in Advent we anticipate Christmas. We wait and prepare for the promised coming of the child of Bethlehem. For some, this waiting means active preparation and excitement. For some, it means a deep loneliness, missing loved ones, and a reality far different from the tranquil Christmas postcard. We wait and hope for a renewed experience of God-with-us, for a renewed knowledge of Christ's presence.

2. *How can we support others who find Advent and Christmas to be lonely?*

But we also wait and hope for something more. We await release. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, wrote: "Life in a prison cell reminds me a great deal about Advent – one waits and hopes and patters about, but in the end what we do is of little consequence, for the door is shut, and it can only be opened from the outside." We acknowledge our yearning for release as we pray, "We confess we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 95) We wait and hope for release from fear and heartache, from loneliness and grief, from sin and brokenness, from whatever imprisons us and captures our hopes, kills our dreams, and limits our imagination.

3. *What do the words of Bonhoeffer mean to you?*
4. *How are we "captive to sin"?*

Our "Advent attitude" as disciples of Jesus is one of *hopeful* waiting. And in our waiting, we hear a word. "The master of the house will come" (Mark 13:35 NSRV). It's a word spoken by a God who by a simple word created all things. It's a word of promise from a God we know to be true to God's word – a word which becomes flesh and dwells among us.

5. *During these next weeks, how will you wait for Christ's coming?*
6. *How might waiting become a gift for you?*

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest. Grant us patience and vigilance in our waiting. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 64:1-9

last word

This week, be aware of times when you wait.
Pray for patience and hope.



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