

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 27, 2005  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Mark 13:32-37  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 63:16b, 17; 64:1-8  
Psalm of the Day: O Antiphons of Advent  
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9  
Gospel: Mark 13:32-37

## Keep Watch!

I've seen some of the articles start popping up already about things to do now that the end of the year is drawing close, now that December is almost here, things to do to get ready for April 15<sup>th</sup>—tax day next year—last minute tax moves you can make to save yourself some money in April. It's kind of nice to know when taxes are due, isn't it? They're due April 15<sup>th</sup>. It would make life a little more interesting, maybe a little more exciting in a bad way, if the government didn't tell us what day the taxes were due and any year it could come at any day at any time. That would kind of throw your finances in an uproar, wouldn't it? Then you would kind of have to always be ready because if you decide they didn't give you enough time, you weren't going to pay them. The government would probably have something to say about that. You would still be held accountable and you would be facing all kinds of challenges.

Our Lord tells us there is a day coming when his second coming will come to this earth—his Second Advent—when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. He gives us signs of the times to know that that day could come at any time—things in nature, famines, earthquakes; things in society, wars and rumors of war; things in the church, false teachers, false prophets. All the signs are present so our Lord says to us “prepare”. This morning he tells us to prepare for Christ's second coming by keeping watch. *“What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”* Keep watch by staying spiritually alert. Don't fall into spiritual sleep is literally what he is saying in these words. Keep watch as though it were your only task is one of the points Jesus really makes in this little illustration that he uses in Mark 13.

Keep watch. Jesus said these words to his disciples on Tuesday of Holy Week. They were leaving the Temple grounds where he had been teaching and where he had been questioned. They are talking about the beauty of the Temple and he tells them not to set their hearts on these things because the time is coming when all these things will be destroyed. He starts talking to them about the end of the world. He says to them in essence, “keep watch”. Be alert. Be alert literally means don't be asleep. Then he tells them to keep watch spiritually and he tells them to do it by staying active spiritually. Do it by staying awake spiritually.

How do you do that? There is really only one way. That is through God's Word and Sacraments. We have them among us in abundance this morning. His Word that comes to us and shows us who we are by nature and how prone we are to fall spiritually asleep. How prone you and I are because of our spiritual nature to only see what is in front of our face and what concerns us for today and tomorrow and when we get real

good, maybe next week or next month. But spiritually we are prone to focus only on the challenges that we have. If things are going well, we tend to forget God. We tend to pat ourselves on the back and maybe give ourselves more credit than we should. If things go bad, it's right there in front of us and we say, "Lord have mercy on us. Lord help me because I need your help." We focus on what is in front of us. God is saying to lift your eyes a little higher. Keep watch because the day is coming when he is going to return. You don't know when it is. It is not on the calendar like April 15<sup>th</sup> is. It's not there. It is going to be at any time. Not even the angels in heaven know, but Christ is going to come back. That is a certainty. When—we don't know. So keep watch.

Don't fall into this idea that you will have time later when you are older to find time to learn more about God and who he is and what he has done for you. Don't tell yourself you will become religious or spiritual later in life. Don't think you have more important things to do right now. That kind of thinking flows out of the devil and our sinful nature. That kind of thinking puts us to spiritual sleep faster than the turkey did this last Thursday. That kind of thinking is dangerous. But that kind of thinking is prevalent and that kind of thinking creeps into your heart and it creeps into my heart at times. It is so easy to just keep going through the motions of what we have to do day after day after day. To take care of our work, to take care of our family, to take care of our relationships, to take care of the batteries in the remote control. We have these things that we are in such a pattern of doing that this idea of keeping watch because Christ might be coming—that is so far down the list the paper doesn't reach that far.

Our God tells us to wake up because he is coming. When he comes, we aren't going to have time to go and check things out. When he comes it is going to be sudden, it is going to be certain, it is going to be absolute, and it will be too late. If he comes and you are spiritually asleep, if you have let things in this life crowd out faith that Jesus lived in your place and died in your place, then you didn't hear God's warning when he said to everyone to keep watch.

Keep watch. Stay spiritually alert. Get into the Word and Sacraments. Get to know the God better who loved you enough to live in your place and die in your place. Go back to your baptism day after day after day. Go back to it when you repent and say, "Lord. Forgive me. I am not spiritually alert as I should be. I am focused on a lot of other things and you are not always one of them. Forgive me. Wash away my sins in Christ's life and death which I was baptized into. Christ, the light of the world—I was baptized into his resurrection. For his sake, forgive me. Forgive me for the times that I despised your Word, when I take the Sacrament of the altar for granted and think of it as something that I really should do instead of seeing it for what it is—your very body and blood there to assure me that you love me and that you want me to be ready when you return. You want me to be so ready that you were willing to live in my place and die in my place and give me this tangible evidence of it—the very body and blood that says to me that you love me and forgive me and that I am your own."

Keep spiritually alert by making use of that Word and Sacrament. That is what our God says to us. Then he tells us, "I have given you a lot of tasks to do. You are to teach and admonish. You are supposed to make disciples of all nations. You are supposed to encourage one another. You are supposed to build one another up. You are

supposed to carry each other burdens. You are supposed to serve me with your thoughts, your words and your actions until the day I return. You have all these tasks to do, but I want you also, while you are doing all of these, to keep watch for my return as though it were your only task.” He tells us it is like a master who goes away and gives all the servants their tasks. We all have them in serving our God. But to the watchman at the door he says, “You keep watch for my return so you can greet me and so that things are ready for me when I return. That is your job. You stay there and you keep watch.” Jesus says in the same way, “Therefore you keep watch because you don’t know when the owner of the house will come back.” It could be at any of the four watches of the night or it could be suddenly when you don’t expect it. So he says, “I am saying to you to do the job of the watchman at the door. Don’t rely on your wife or your husband or your parents or your children to keep watch for you—you keep watch. You stay connected to me. You stay close to me. This is your job. This is the task I have given you that needs to be a priority in your life.” Don’t think because your spouse is in church all the time that that is going to strengthen you. You need to be with the Word and with the Sacraments. You need to know God’s love for you better and better. You need to see your sin in Scripture day after day so that you repent of it and turn to God for forgiveness. You need to be the one that keeps watch as though it were your only task.

God says that to us and he knows he has given us other tasks. He knows that he has given us responsibilities in the work place. He gave us that job. He knows he has given us responsibilities as parents. He has given us those children. He knows he has given us responsibilities as members of the congregation because he put us together here so that we can serve the Lord and each other. He knows all these tasks, but he also tells us that while we are carrying them out, we need to keep watch as though we are the doorman. We need to always make sure we are ready. When your head hits the pillow at night ask yourself, “If Christ comes before I wake up, am I ready to meet him?” When you get up in the morning and you say to yourself, “If Christ comes before this day over, am I ready to meet him?”

That is what the Lord wants from each of us. The amazing thing is that even though you and I fail, even though you and I don’t always prepare the way we should, our God still says to us, “I love you. I have taken away your sins in Christ.” That is what moves us to want to be prepared all the more and to get to know him better.