

“Waiting In Hope”

(Mark 13:24 – 37)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This Sunday marks a new “season” in the church calendar. After a series of twenty-four Sundays called simply “After Pentecost,” the church around the world is now called to focus on a new turn in our journey. And as we do, it’s good that we take a stock of the state of affairs. So we to take moment and think about the issues confronting us at the moment, as we face a new year.

As a **PARISH** we face many challenges, and On a **PERSONAL LEVEL** we all have our concerns – health, family, finances – all sorts of personal struggles and issues.

We live in a world in which the fog of sin has set in, threatening to shut out whatever light that shines in it. Think of those:

- who suffer from illness,
- who haven't been able to find decent work,
- or who suffer the loneliness and isolation of loss.
- who are hungry and homeless and are without hope for a better life any time soon.

And think of the many who suffer because they believe in Jesus.

It is exactly this kind of turbulence that Jesus declares his hope to his disciples as he prepares to go to his death for us.

The words at the beginning of Mark 13 envisage a time when the temple will be destroyed and Jesus followers will be persecuted. In these words Jesus indicates what lies ahead for the early Christians. In the year 64 Nero began his persecution of the Christians in Rome – when Christians were subjected to horrors unimaginable. In 70 A.D. the Temple was destroyed.

Jesus words were words that described almost an end of the world for the Jews and early Christians. But Jesus also spoke hope into this setting – the promise of the coming of the Son of Man, the promise that in the fullness of his return new life and hope would spring forth.

This is what Jesus says we are to do:

WAIT IN HOPE

In other words - stay awake, be prepared, and watch with hope!

But staying awake and being hopeful, especially in hopeless situations, is not that easy! Extreme distress can induce lethargy. In this we're in the same situation that the disciples were in. In the following chapter [14], the scene shifts half way through the chapter to the garden of **Gethsemane** where we know the disciples kept falling asleep, even though they had been asked to stay awake and keep watch with Jesus.

In the midst of the problems facing the world and the church, we can end up being like the disciples and doze off, and miss out on his coming to us in the here and now in **Word** and **Sacrament!** This is not a perfect coming, [like Paul says in 1 Cor:13:12 "**Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.**"]

But it is a coming and a presence of his grace never-the-less!

But that day will yet come when Jesus brings all things to completion and the new heaven and the new earth are joined once again as they were in Eden and the Son of Man will have come in all his glory, and we will see God face to face and God will be our God and we will be His people.

It's the coming of that kingdom that was ushered in by the coming of the Child in Bethlehem. Christmas is so much more than a date in December, even more than a birthday celebration for baby Jesus! Christmas is the assurance that God has rent the heavens and come down into our world of pain. It's the assurance that God has not forgotten His promises of old!

Promises to Adam and Eve; to Abraham, to Isaiah, to David and now to us.

Gen 3:15 "***I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.***"

Isaiah 7:14 ¹⁴ "***Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.***"

It's the assurance that He will come again to bring it all to its fulfilment because He has invested His very self to rescue it. It is the assurance that He has made us to be the people of God when he called us in Holy Baptism.

Our **WAITING IN HOPE** is not passive thing, it is not just sitting around, marking-time, going nowhere. Our waiting takes place in the context of our worship, of our lives lived with God and with each other, in lives faithfully working at our mandate to make disciples of all nations, including our immediate neighbourhoods.

Whatever confronts us in our ministry we are reminded that our God is with us; Jesus has come, is here and is coming!

As we begin our Advent journey as a congregation we face uncertain times and difficult choices in determining what God is asking of us now. We pray that will we be God's people who are awake and attuned to Christ's presence with us and in the world around us!

God grant this to us. **Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck read by Pastor John Simboras, 29
November 2020