

Second Sunday of End Times B (Judgment)

November 8, 2009

Hymns: 351 - 382 - 208 - 22

MARK 13:1-8 (24-32)

GOOD NEWS ABOUT JUDGMENT DAY

***It's Good We Don't Know When It Will Be.**

***It's Good To Know God Is In Control.**

***It's Good God Has Provided For Us To Be Prepared.**

Grace and peace to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come! Amen!

Dear Fellow Saint Awaiting the Coming of Christ,

A Minnesotan worked at a small radio station during his undergraduate day. These were the days before computers and CDs. They were a small operation so the deejays also read the news. The news they read each hour came in on two teletype machines which clattered away constantly. What he remembers most was that these machines had bells attached that the broadcaster could hear faintly even in the broadcast booth. These bells would go off when a particularly important story came over the wire. Posted above the teletype machine was a list of what the various number of rings of the bells meant. Normal headlines and news was signaled with only one or two rings--three or four rings meant a severe storm or tornado--five or six rings meant a major accident or disaster (like a plane crash or ship sinking)--seven or eight rings meant a national emergency of some type (like the death of a president)--nine or ten rings meant a grave national or global threat (a nuclear attack was the definition in those days.) Under the last entry--fifteen rings--someone had written, "Vikings win the Super Bowl." Maybe this is the year those bells would have gone off!

Today's text would require an infinite number of rings. Mark 13 is one of those chapters in the Bible that would scare you to death if you were to dwell on it--and some pastors do dwell on it, as you know. Chapter 13 of Mark is about the end of the world. Earthquakes, giant buildings falling down, wars and rumors of wars and eventually, "*the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*" It's a scene to which even Hollywood with all its special effects could not do justice. It's scary.

But life is scary. Isn't it? I don't want to ruin your day, but even if you and I are not here when history comes to an end and the "stars fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies are shaken" there is much in life to fear. If you were in the Twin Towers on 9-11, you would think the world had come to an end. For 2750 people who died that tragic day, it was the end of this world. Every day people die in tragic accidents, or homicides. Every day, someone gets a diagnosis of a fatal disease. We don't have to think about the end of time to get ourselves into an anxious state. There are enough possible personal tragedies to keep us in turmoil. And so we need to deal with Mark 13. We need to confront the fact of dramatic upheavals that will come to us all as time passes, whether it is the end of the world, or a terrorist attack or a life-threatening disease or whatever may come our way.

(slide 1) None of us knows the future. That's the first thing we need to see. As the popular saying goes, "If you want to give God a laugh, show Him your Dayplanner." It's only prudent that we make plans and that we keep to schedules, but no one really knows what tomorrow will bring. Be careful driving home today. You never know . . . And, of course, that's just the point. I think it's telling that in this 13th chapter of Mark our Master says that even He in His human state of humility denied Himself knowledge of when God will bring down the final curtain on the human experiment. We read in *verse 32*, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

Of course, that doesn't keep self-anointed prophets from setting dates from time to time and getting gullible followers all alarmed. The world will end someday. Every good scientist will tell you that. The Bible teaches us that at that time Christ will come to take His believers to Himself in heaven. You would think that would cause Christians to rejoice rather than to recoil in horror. But we do not know when that will be, personally or as a people. Well, someday God will come. We don't know when. But of even more relevance to each of us, there will come a time when God will come for us personally. Maybe you would like to know when that time will be. Most of us, I suspect, would rather not know. It would be too heavy a burden to bear. Or, too much of a temptation to put off preparing ourselves, or too much temptation to put off that sin right now which dangles before us like the proverbial carrot on a stick – when we might think there will be plenty of time to change our ways and repent. No, it is important we leave the time of death or Christ's return to God.

That brings us to the second truth we need to acknowledge: God is still in charge. **(slide 2)** There is much in life that is beyond our control, but nothing is beyond God's control. And God is our Abba, our Daddy. He loves us intimately, so why not leave things in God's hands and relax. In a cartoon there is a picture of God standing next to an open filing cabinet. Open files are strewn around that filing cabinet and God, in obvious despair, has His hand on His head. The caption has God saying, "[O no,] I seem to have lost my copy of the divine plan." Well, God hasn't lost His copy of the divine plan, and God's plan is still in effect. God is in charge of how and when time will end. And God is in charge of our lives. God will provide for our needs, regardless of what may come.

One day a seminary class was discussing the Second Coming of Christ. A student asked the professor a question that took him by surprise. The question was this: "What will He say when He shouts?" The student said, "Professor, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be." "Enough," the professor said in answer to the question. "He will shout, Enough! when He returns."

A look of surprise opened the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" And the good professor said firmly, "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough sin. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. ENOUGH ALREADY!"

God's plan is that – for His people - there will come a time when suffering and death and despair will all be taken away. Enough! God has not mislaid God's plan. Whatever comes our way, we can trust God for our future. God is in control. No one knows what the future may bring, but we do Who holds the future. That One is our Loving Parent. God is in control.

This brings us to the final thing we need to say: be prepared. The Christian's motto for confronting the future is, "Be prepared." One of the tasks of life that many of us take quite seriously is to be prepared. We watch our savings, our 401(k)s, our stocks, our mutual funds. We want to have the funds we need for our old age. And we take care to make sure we are part of a good health plan, just in case. And that we have enough insurance for our family. And we try to take care of ourselves physically and mentally and emotionally. We want to be strong in order to be able to meet any unexpected challenges.

But how are we doing in our preparations spiritually? And this is just the place Mark 13 focuses. It may irk us as we drive through rural parts of our country to see the crude graffiti, "Are you prepared to meet God?" That doesn't keep it from being an important question. Are you prepared to meet God? Will you be able to give a good accounting of your life when that time comes? If we to have to stand on our own merits, we would be in deep trouble. If we would need to be perfect in our holiness, we would face a thumbs down from our Judge.

But we can plead God's mercy in Christ! Through daily contrition and repentance, we find grace and forgiveness in our God. Yes, we are saved by grace, not works! But that doesn't lessen our need to grow spiritually. We need deep spiritual resources to draw on for the challenges we may face in the future, whatever may happen to our world. Are you prepared? Have you learned to draw upon God's strength? Have you learned to trust God for the living of your life? Are you prepared? Regardless of when it will be, one day we will meet our Creator. We need to feed our souls on Word and Sacrament towards that day!

(Slide 3) Our choir director is going away for most of the month of January. Imagine that she gives the choir music for singing in church the first Sunday in February – and goes away. She comes back first for that morning and expects to stand before the choir and conduct in the singing of their anthem – and it will go as well as if she had been to all the practices! If that doesn't give our choir members a rush of adrenalin – I don't know what could? Seeing Judgment Day arriving and not being prepared?!

And that's why we can't neglect Mark 13 with all its scary elements. We need to ask ourselves whether we are ready for the great Concert Day. We need to take an accounting of our lives. No one knows the future, but we know the One Who holds the future. What is the state of our soul? Are we prepared for whatever may come our way? Are we prepared to meet God?

(slide 4) Christ has prepared the way for us. He took our sins to His cross and paid the price. Furthermore, He washed our sins away in the waters of our Baptism. Now He sends His Holy Spirit to keep us in the faith through Word and Sacrament as mentioned above. God is faithful! We have not been. Our ongoing sinfulness should rightly terrorize us. But we can live out our days in peace and rest safely at night knowing that through faith we are secure against the Day of Judgment. When will that Great Day come? You and I can't know. But because we are prepared through faith, we can join the Apostle John in his closing prayer of Scripture: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen!

To Him Who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority now and forever. Amen.