

Be Alert

Mark 13:24-37 (November 29, 2020)

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²⁴“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Historical Context

Mark 13 is known as “The Little Apocalypse,” because of its similarity in tone to Revelation. Mark writes either right before or soon after the great Jewish War that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple’s destruction in 70 CE. The destruction of the Temple represents a catastrophe of divine presence and continuity with the past.

Theme: Be Alert

The Gospel reading for this week is not the kind of passage we automatically think about when we’re kicking off Advent and turning our attention to “the most wonderful time of the year.” Mark talks about how “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.” Of course, for a lot of people, it isn’t the most wonderful time of the year.

The season of Advent is about expectation, about waiting for Christ. But, Advent isn’t just about waiting for the baby in the manger. It’s about expecting Christ here, in our own lives, right now. We are called to be on the lookout for the big return, but we are also to be aware of the many ways Christ appears in the present. Are we alert to see where Christ arrives, breaking through time and space to be present in our lives and the lives of others? And—more to the point—are we willing to be his hands and feet?

As we wait for Christ to return, we have jobs to do. What are those jobs? This week’s text offers a twofold message: First, be busy with what Jesus has called us to do as you wait for his return. As a nation, we are becoming more and more divided; as individuals, we know our neighbors less and less. Jesus calls us to reach out beyond such boundaries and be Christ to one another. And second, be alert to how and where Jesus appears in your own life.