

²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. ²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it^[a] is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert^[b]! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Christians Are Looking Forward to That Day

The Church has a calendar and I’m not talking about the calendar you find in your church newsletter or on your church website. The church calendar is not broken up into months and days, but festivals and seasons. The church year has a festival half and a non-festival half. The festival half is about Christ. His seasons are: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter. The non-festival half is about the Christian Church and her season is Pentecost. Pentecost is the birth of the New Testament Church and the Last Sunday of Pentecost is that day when Jesus returns from heaven to earth for his church.

Last week we contemplated the Judgment part of *that* day, but this week contemplate the joyful fulfillment of the last promise Jesus made to us and all of his disciples when Jesus said, “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you where I am*” (Jn 14). In our Gospel Jesus gives us at least three encouragements to help us look forward to *that* Day and the first encouragement is Jesus’ return is a sure thing. In the first half of our Gospel I counted 5 “wills”. “*At that time people will see the Son of Man coming,*” ... “*And he will send his angels,*” ... “*Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*” “*Heaven and earth will pass away,*” ... “*my words will never pass away.*”

Jesus speaks as confidently about that day as we can speak about the lesson of the fig tree. Jesus taught, “*As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.*” Many states in our country look forward to summer. Other states look forward to winter. Christians look forward to Jesus returning to take them to heaven. Jesus’ return is a sure thing. That is our first encouragement.

And our second encouragement is Jesus returns with great power and glory. Jesus himself said, “*people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*” This second advent will be much different from Christ’s first advent. The first time Jesus did not come with great power and glory. The first time Jesus came to this earth it was in weakness and humility. Not many people saw Jesus on the night of his birth and none of them saw baby Jesus with great power and glory. At times the disciples saw glimpses of this power and glory. Jesus, at times, revealed his power with his mighty miracles. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus revealed a glimpse of his glory to apostles Peter, James and John.

When Jesus returns all people will see Jesus with great power and glory. I don’t know how great this great power will look like, but we all know when Jesus returns, our body of sin will be gone. Never again will we have feelings of jealousy or greed or lust. Never again will we say what is wrong and hurtful. Never again will we do something we are ashamed of. What power! And what glory! I don’t know how great the glory will be, but we all know when Jesus returns our bodies will be glorified. No longer will our bodies be subject to illness or injury or disease or decay. We will live forever and we will live better than ever! What great power and glory. That is our second encouragement and that day might sound too good to be true.

We all have experienced empty promises: Parents who love us sometimes forget the promises they have made us. Even the good leaders let us down sometimes. Our friends are not always the friends we thought them to be. We know if it sounds too good to be true it probably is too good to be true. Our history of broken promises with the people in our lives has the potential to make us pessimistic with the promises of Jesus.

Our third encouragement from verse 27, *“And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”* Our third encouragement is we will be gathered. It would have been enough for Jesus to gather his people or God will gather those who believe in him. But here in chapter 13 Jesus drops a title that hasn't been shared earlier in the Gospel of Mark until now and that is God will gather his elect.

The beauty of this teaching of election is your whole life has been a part of God's plan. Before the creation of God elected those who would believe the gospel for salvation. He ruled over all history that they would hear the gospel, believe it, die in saving faith and enter heaven. We don't need this teaching of election. Because of how this teaching has been abused, we don't speak of election much. It's enough to believe in Jesus and be saved, but when life gets miserable as it does sometimes in this world and the weakness of your flesh starts to wonder whether God even knows what is going on much less care about you, this doctrine of election can be a source of great comfort. You don't need this doctrine, but the nature of your God is to be generous and it's good for you to know this doctrine of election is there for you.

Three encouragements to help you look forward to that day: 1) Jesus' return is a sure thing, 2) Jesus returns with great power and glory and 3) You will be gathered. The natural question for us to ask is when, but the spiritual question Jesus wants us to ask is how or what. How does God want me to be when he returns? Or what does God want me doing when he returns? Jesus offers this clear instruction, *“³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”*

The picture Jesus paints is not all that difficult to see. Children, students and employees see it all the time. Parents, teachers and employers can't have eyes on their children and students and employees all the time, but when their eyes are on those who are under their supervision they had better be on their assigned task or there will be trouble. What is your assigned task as a Christian? Believe in Jesus. And faith in Jesus is not as easy as it sounds. It's a matter of the heart. And Jesus tells you to love the Lord your God will all your heart. That means as Martin Luther teaches in his catechism that you do not despise preaching and God's Word, but gladly hear and learn it. It means you hear God's Word and keep it.

As a member of this congregation that means as God gives you strength you want to be in the numbers of our worship and Bible study attendance. As a member of this congregation you want to have your name on the cleaning crew and as God gives you strength you want to show up and do the work and as God gives you strength be willing for other opportunities of service. As a member of this congregation you want your offering amount to be a generous amount as it compares with what God has given you with income. And as a member of your family and as a citizen of this country you want to be faithful in your responsibilities as God gives you strength.

That is why it doesn't really matter when the Lord returns because whether it's the day before that day or that day or the day Jesus wants us to love him with all hearts. That doesn't change even though ability to serve God faithfully will change when he returns. What Jesus says to you today, he says to everyone, *“Watch!”* Practically speaking, how does Jesus talk to everyone when everyone isn't here? Jesus does this with pastors and church leaders who call on their members during the week, or e-mail or text them. Jesus does this when parents are the primary catechism teachers for their children. Jesus does this when Christian friends emphasize the Christian part of their friendship.

Pastor Sellnow preached the last 2 Sundays and so I had 21 days to think about this sermon text. Most of that time I spent with my eyes in the skies, looking for Jesus, thinking maybe I don't have to prepare this message. As those 21 days between messages became less and less I worked on this message more and more. It's not a bad idea to every once in a while to look up with your eyes on the skies and contemplate the return of your Lord Jesus Christ. But don't look too long. That might not be good for your retina and that won't be good for your assigned task. You have work to do and words to say as you look forward to Christ's return. Amen.