

MESSAGE for Nov 27, 2011**Mark 13:24-37***Power in Our Weakness***The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Well, it started. This week our children, who are 6 and 8, started the interrogation. With piercing eyes and a persistence that would make even the most hardened criminal crack. They asked, “When is it going to be Christmas?”

“In a month,” I answered. That wasn’t good enough. Children can’t grasp the concept of a month. They just know that’s a long time. The interrogation continued the next day, and the next, and the next. Finally we showed them a calendar so they can count down to Christmas and know exactly when it will be here. The count down has started in our household.

In a month we will celebrate the birth of Jesus – Savior of the world, King of kings, and Lord of lords. The one in whom we have life in this world and the next. The one who makes all things possible.

But did you notice the assigned reading for today from Mark’s gospel? I want to know who picked this text. It points not to Jesus’ first coming as a babe in Bethlehem; it points to his second coming when he will come again to judge the living and the dead at the end of the ages.

It says nothing about Mary or Joseph, nothing about shepherds or wise men, nothing about angels or John the Baptist, there is no joyful news about the coming of the Christ child. This reading doesn’t point to the beginning of Jesus’ life; it points to the end of the world as we know it with talk of suffering, and darkness, and the powers of heaven being shaken. What’s up with that?

Like anxious children wanting to know about Christmas coming, many of us want to know when the end is coming. When will these things take place?

Do you remember Harold Camping? This past year he predicted that that day, judgment day, the end-of-the-world day would come on May 21, 2011. That day came and went. He then said the Rapture had started on that date and would be complete on October 21, 2011. That date came and went too.

The world as we know it is still here, unless this is heaven. No, I’m pretty sure this isn’t heaven. Maybe this is that other place. No, I’m pretty sure this isn’t that other place either, although it may feel like it at times.

Jesus says in our reading for today that, “*no one knows about that day or hour, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.*” There are some things that only God knows. God knows when the end will be and that’s good enough for me.

Too bad Jesus couldn't give us a divine calendar so we could mark off the days to when he will come again. Then we would know. But Jesus can't do that because he doesn't know when that will be. Instead he says live by faith, not fear. Actually he says "Keep watch." He doesn't say, "Watch out!" He says, "Keep watch." There's a huge difference.

Harold Camping and others like him share a message of fear, not faith. Their message is "watch out!" not "keep watch!"

We keep watch for the school bus at our house especially around 3:45 in the afternoon. We look for signs of the bus coming up the street because we know who's returning from school.

In the same way we watch for signs of Jesus. We keep watch for his return. Some day Jesus will return and that is good news! It's good news because on that day God's will, will finally be done on earth as it is in heaven.

John put it this way in the book of Revelation chapter 21:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'"

Does that sound like bad news, or good news?

Does that sound like a threat, or a promise?

Does that sound like something to be afraid of, or something to look forward to?

When Jesus says, "Keep watch," I don't hear him say, live in fear. I hear him say, live in faith with hopeful expectations. The best is yet to come. He's telling us to keep our eyes open with great anticipation to that day when he will restore all things. And what a glorious day that will be.

That's what this season of Advent is all about. It's a season of hope and expectation to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth *and* to prepare for the celebration of his coming again. Come Lord Jesus, we pray.

We live in the meantime between Jesus first coming and his second coming. Truth is these are mean times.

We don't have to look very far to see that we live in a broken creation. This world has been shattered by sin. Every one of us here has felt the affects of sin in our lives in one way or another perhaps everyday. We all need God's salvation and God's restoration.

Do you not yearn for more than what you are experiencing right now? I do!
Do you not ache with a sense that life isn't the way it could be or should be? I do!

So what are we going to do about it? I have two suggestions.

First: keep watch! Watch not for the signs, watch for Jesus. Look for him in the lives of those around you and you will find him. Look for the ways he is active in your life compelling you with power to do his work in the world. Where 2 or 3 gather in Jesus' name – he is there. So keep watch!

Second, get ready! In our house when we know that someone is coming over; we vacuum, we dust, we cleanup, we pick up, and we put away. We have company coming tonight so if you want to see our house all cleaned up and ready, stop by before 3:00 because after that it's going to be a mess again. What do you need to do to get ready for Jesus so he feels welcome in your house, in your life, in your heart? Get ready!

We are called by Jesus to be his people of faith, not fear. We know that life in this world isn't the way God intended it to be. Some day it will be. God is in the restoration business. Some day Jesus will come again in power and glory to change the world for good to change *your life* for good. That day might just be today. So... keep watch and get ready! Amen.