



FIRST LESSON
ISAIAH 64:1-9

PSALM
PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19

SECOND LESSON
1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. MARK 13:24-37

PRAYER OF THE DAY

STIR UP YOUR POWER, LORD
CHRIST, AND COME. BY
YOUR MERCIFUL PROTECTION
AWAKEN US TO THE
THREATENING DANGERS OF
OUR SINS, AND KEEP US
BLAMELESS UNTIL THE
COMING OF YOUR NEW
DAY, FOR YOU LIVE AND
REIGN WITH THE FATHER
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE
GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.
AMEN.

9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111

VOICE
(303) 770-9300

FAX
(303) 770-9301

WEB
WWW.STPLC.ORG

Liturgical Day: The First Sunday in Advent
Date: November 30, 2008
Sermon Title: A Waiting, Watching Advent

*Keep alert; beware
When it comes, nobody knows
Be watchful; awake*

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

This is a great time of year for those of us in the church. A friend of mine put it well: "With all this talk about thanksgiving, I can't help but remember that God is behind all the good in my life." And it's true: I am quite aware in these days of how good God has been to me.

- Betsy and I celebrated the beginning of our twenty-third year of marriage this past week.
- We have two healthy, growing, faithful children who are doing well in school.
- God has provided me with a terrific church to Pastor.
- I get to live in a place as beautiful as Colorado.
- For me, the list could go on and on.

This season of thanksgiving seems to bring out the best in us, whether it's a renewed sense of gratitude for how God has graced us, or a greater commitment to share with others.

And it's not only those of us in the church: our culture seems to have embraced it as well. We see signs of it all over town. There have been numerous articles in the paper lately about significant efforts to share with the hungry. As the economy continues to slide, and more and more families struggle, food banks are receiving more requests for support and more donations than usual. Thanksgiving food baskets have been distributed by civic organizations. Our culture as a whole seems to have adopted this spirit of Thanksgiving, from the food that is distributed this past week, to the Salvation Army Santas that we'll hear for the next month or so.

The converging messages from our faith and our culture, focused on thanksgiving, make this a season of sharing and caring for all of us; a season that displays the very best of who we can be. So with these thoughts I flipped to one of the Christian broadcasting television stations the other day. I was hoping that maybe they would be showing some of the good work that I being done for Thanksgiving Day, or explaining some of the plans being made to celebrate Christmas in a similar manner.

And what do you suppose I found? It certainly didn't have anything to do with sharing. Instead, I saw three people sitting in a lavishly appointed studio, discussing their views of what Scripture teaches us about the end of the world. Well, let me tell you, I was steamed. Living in this world of ours - as filled as it is with need, and being so tremendously blessed as we are, here this group of people sat, guessing what the end of the world was going to be like.

**A Joyful and
Thankful Season**

**TV Preachers and
The End of Time**



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

I was furious! There are few things more

frustrating to me than Christians who speculate endlessly about the future. They ask so many bizarre and seemingly unimportant questions, like: Will there be a “pre-millennial” or a “post-millennial” rapture? What exactly does “666” refer to? Will those who have already died be raised before our eyes, or are they already with God? We just as well speculate as to how many angels can dance on the end of a pin. Speculating about the future: what could be more futile than that? What could be more of a waste of time?

You can imagine my frustration when, struggling with these thoughts, I began my study of this morning’s Gospel. It is a Bible passage featuring Jesus who talks about the end of the world. And not only today’s Gospel, but the whole thirteenth chapter of St. Mark deals with the coming of the end. Jesus’ words, in this thirteenth chapter are (simply enough) get ready – the end of the world is just around the corner –maybe even sooner than you think. Now I don’t know about you, but to me, these are depressing words to read. And that is especially true during this Thanksgiving weekend, as we begin to ready ourselves for the coming of the Advent and Christmas seasons: a time of giving gifts and spreading good cheer.

**Jesus and the
End of Time**

How could it be that the tradition of our church asks us to look at this depressing Scripture: a scripture filled with words that pull us away from our feelings of joy? Words that cause us to consider the end of all things as we know them? Well, to answer that question, one really has to ask what the Season of Advent is all about.

One answer, an answer that we turn to each year at this time, was given in the twelfth century by a man named St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard reminded us that the word “advent” is similar to the word “arrival”, and so during the season of Advent, we recognize the three advents of Christ. We consider the arrival of Christ in the past in Bethlehem. We consider the arrival of Christ in the present through grace into the hearts of God’s people. And we consider the anticipated arrival of Christ in the future at the end of time.

**Bernard’s 3-Fold
Description of
Advent**

Now we Lutherans have been good at the first of these three. For many years we have developed beautiful traditions of celebrating the birth of the Christ Child, with traditions that include not only worship services, but special family dinners, and the exchange of gifts; even the mailing of cards and special letters. These traditions help us to remember every year that Jesus came to the world in the form of the Christ Child in Bethlehem. And so Advent has been for many of us a chance to “rev ourselves up” for the celebration of Christmas.

More recently, we’ve even become better at the second of these three: considering the coming of Christ in the present into our hearts. In past years, many in our tradition have been somewhat self conscious when it comes to talking about our faith with others. But nowadays it seems that even we Lutherans are opening up a bit. Talking about our faith and what it means to us. Sharing with our friends and coworkers that Christ has come into our lives. Opening ourselves up to the transformation God wants to work in our lives. And hopefully, by letting others see the “advent” that Christ has had in our lives, they’ll become interested in experiencing the same. So we find ourselves to be pretty good at considering the Advent of Christ in the past, and becoming better at considering the Advent of Christ in the present.

But considering the Advent of Christ in the future, the event that our fundamentalist and Pentecostal brothers and sisters call “The Second Coming of Christ,” that’s not something that we spend much time with. We Lutherans usually prefer to skip out of those conversations, and concentrate on something else. It’s dangerous, you see, to concentrate too much on the future; the here-after. One might get so tied up with our future heavenly reward, that we lose track of our responsibilities as present people in a hurting world. So we choose, instead, to ignore it. To try and forget that the Bible teaches us that Jesus will one day come again to our world.

But the words of Jesus in today’s lesson really don’t allow for that. In the beginning of chapter thirteen, the disciples ask him, “When will the end of the world come?” And in our passage he gives a haunting reply to the disciples’ question. Jesus says: “You do not know when the end will come, so be on guard! Be alert! Keep watch.” Jesus wants his followers to understand that they have been left with many responsibilities. They are to continue to do the work that Jesus has begun. They are to keep the Lord’s household in good

order. They are to tend to the business that the master has left for them.

As far as he is concerned, there is no time to stand around wondering about when and how it will come. There is too much work to do — too many people to reach. And he wants them, instead, to get busy with it. What does it mean to anticipate the future Advent of Jesus Christ today? I suspect that there is one way Jesus that would have us anticipate his future coming at the end of the world. And that is to do the work he has left for us in the world. Not sitting around speculating when the end will be. Not thinking in fear about the events that will surround his return to our world. But continuing to do the work he has set out for us. What is that work? As our Gospel lesson taught us last week: It is feeding the hungry. Giving drink to the thirsty. Clothing the naked. Visiting those in prison.

An Active Waiting

I get frustrated with them, but maybe we could learn just a little from our fundamentalist and Pentecostal friends. Maybe we need to acknowledge that Jesus has promised to return to us one day. And God willing, he'll find us busy at work with the tasks he has left us to do: spreading God's love in word and deed.

This is a season in which we concentrate on the Advent of our Lord, as he came to us in the past, in the birth of the Christ Child, as he comes to us in the present, when our hearts are filled by his presence, and also as he promises to come to us in the future, at the end of the age. May that future Advent of Jesus Christ be a part of our Advent observances this year, as we seek to discern what work Christ has left us to do in the household of God.

A blessed Advent season to you all. May the promises of our God stand firm in your hearts, even the promise that before too long, Christ will return and gather us into his arms, so that we might be with him forever.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (January 2, 2009)

Gospel Lesson (English Text):ⁱ

^{13:24} "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then 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. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven 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. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴ It 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. ³⁵ Therefore, 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."ⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson (Greek Text):

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html

ⁱⁱ St. Mark 13:24-37, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{13.24} Ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς, ²⁵ καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες σκονταί ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πίπτοντες, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς σαλευθήσονται.

²⁶ καὶ τότε ψονταί τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς καὶ δόξης. ²⁷ καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἐπισυνάξει τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς [αὐτοῦ] ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ' ἄκρου γῆς ὡς κρου οὐρανοῦ.

²⁸ Ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς συκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολὴν τὴν δὴ ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς ἀπαλὸς γένηται καὶ ἐκφύη τὰ φύλλα, γινώσκετε τι ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν ²⁹ ὡστὺς καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν δῆτε ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσκετε τι ἐγγὺς ἐστίν ἐπὶ θύραις. ³⁰ Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν τι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη μέχρις οὗ ταῦτα πάντα γένηται. ³¹ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονταί, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονταί. ³² Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανοῦ οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ. ³³ Βλέπετε, ἀγρυπνεῖτε οὐκ οοδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ καιρὸς ἐστίν.

³⁴ Ὡς νθρωπος ἀπόδημος ἀφείς τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ δούς τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐκάστῳ τὸ ργον αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ θυρωρῷ ἐνετείλατο να γρηγορή. ³⁵ γρηγορεῖτε οὖν οὐκ οοδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας ρχεται, ἢ ὅψὲ μεσονύκτιον ἀλεκτοροφωνίας πρῶτῃ, ³⁶ μὴ ἐλθὼν ἐξαίφνης εερεῖ ὑμᾶς καθεύδοντας. ³⁷ ὁ δὲ ὑμῖν λέγω πᾶσιν λέγω, γρηγορεῖτε. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Mark 13:24-37, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).