

Come, Lord Jesus

First Sunday of Advent (Hope)

MARK 13:24–37

“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.

If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’

December 3, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures - John 20:25 & 29, 1Peter 1:8

LIVING BY FAITH

There are two things about the Gospel of Jesus Christ that make it difficult to believe:

1. The idea that an ordinary human, Jesus of Nazareth, is actually the almighty and eternal God, and
2. That through his death he secures eternal salvation for all who believe in him.

Both of these concepts – the concept of the full deity of the real human, Jesus Christ, and the concept that his death is a sin-bearing death – are proved invalid if Jesus did not rise from the dead. But the concept of Christ's resurrection adds a further hindrance to belief in the Gospel, because real and permanent physical resurrection simply does not happen.

Thomas expressed his grief-stricken doubt when the other disciples reported their meeting with the resurrected Jesus:

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” [John 20:25].

For Thomas, as for the other disciples, all the hopes generated by the words of Jesus, and all of the glorious expectations generated by the miracles of Jesus – all had been dashed to pieces by the death of Jesus:

The hope & the certainty, that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah

The expectation of a restored kingdom, & even more, of a restored earth

The hope that the age-old, deep human longing to really know God was here, in Christ, satisfied

The joyous expectation that here, somehow, because of Christ, the equally age-long rift between God and humans could be removed

So great was Thomas' anguish and disillusionment that he could not bring himself to accept the testimony of his friends. So much was at stake. He would not allow his hopes to be revived only to be dashed to pieces again.

Only if he saw

Only if he touched with his hands

Only then would he hope again

Only then would he believe

Then Jesus came. He stretched out his hands. He pulled aside his robe to reveal the pierced side.

Provided with the visible, physical evidence, Thomas believed, and responded with his confession of faith – *'My Lord and my God!'*

Jesus said to him:

'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed [verse 29].

Perhaps Peter was remembering this when he wrote:

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the salvation of your souls" [1Peter 1:8].

None of us reading this reflection have seen the incarnate Son of God. We have not physically heard his voice. We have not touched him with our hands as the disciples had. But we have believed in him. It is to those who thus walk by faith, without seeing, that the blessing pronounced by Christ applies – and along with it the inexpressible and glorious joy of which Peter wrote.

"blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"

Happy Birthday Lenore (12/5)

Put the past behind you - look forward to a new year

Another year is coming to an end; and for that, many are grateful ... that it is almost over! It has been a very trying year for a lot of God's people and many are still waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises.

"For yet a little while, that which is coming will come and will not delay." (Hebrews 10:37) God is faithful! He is never late or early, but right on time. ("God's delays are not God's denials"). Actually, while we are waiting on the Lord, He is "working in us the desire to do His will" and to develop the character that will enable us to fulfill His will.

"The Lord will wait that He may be gracious to you, and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you." (Isaiah 30:18) Everything we receive from God will be by "grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is a gift of God." We can't earn it, we don't deserve it, and we sure can't produce it. That's why it is called Grace – God's unearned favor and blessing. The struggles, trials, and adversity that we have experienced this last year have been used as a preparation for that which God is about to do this next year and beyond.

God will wait until we stop focusing on our own strength, and ourselves and trust Him to do what needs to be done. The only requirement that the Lord needs from us is a "little mustard seed of faith" – to believe that He is able to do what He has said!

The Lord is "preparing us for the place He has prepared for us." Only when we stop living for ourselves and start living for Jesus, will we experience the fulfillment of the promises of God and find our true purpose in this life.

It has been said, preoccupation with self leads to insanity. I wonder how many "normal" every-day people, including Christians, are actually "border-line." Living for yourself will drive you "nuts."

As we look forward to this New Year, we need to "forget those things that are behind, and look forward" to the fulfillment of those things that God has spoken to us. We need to leave our failures, our mistakes, and our regrets at the cross of Christ, and stop focusing on our past, or ourselves but on Jesus, who is the "Author and the Finisher of our faith". (Psalm 138:8) – "The Lord will perfect and complete that which concerns me!"

At the Last Supper, we see that the Apostle Peter was so "full of himself," that he was not fit "for the Master's use". He failed miserably when the time of testing came. Yet his failure was in God's plan to prepare Peter for the place prepared for Him. He had to be emptied of himself so that God could fill him up with Himself.