

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Last Sunday after Pentecost
25 November 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Mark 13:24-37

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

What do you hold on to in the end?

If your house is burning down, what do you run in to grab?
What is worth risking your life to hold on to?
What will you keep and save and snatch from the fire?

Is it a picture?
A safe?
That hidden wad of cash tucked in the back of your drawer?
Is it a book of memories or a computer?
Do you run in for your dog?

What will you snatch from the fire, what will you risk, what will you save?

Dear Christians, the days are coming, the time is at hand, the end is near.
Be on guard.
Stay awake.

For you do not know when that time will come.

And if you're not ready what will you save?
If you're asleep in the house and it comes burning down, will you even make it out?

In our Gospel today our Lord Jesus tells us what that day will be like:

“It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge,
each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.
Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come,
in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—
lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.
And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.” (Mk 13:34-36)

Now, we've had our share of crazies over the last year and a half.

Remember all the hubbub about the world ending—

I think it was May 15th, or something like that.

And due to a miscalculation, it was moved to October 15th.

And then when both dates came and went, it was back to the drawing board.

Our world is full of a lot of rubbish, when it comes to talk of the end.

There's about a million ways you can get it wrong.

You go wrong when you get the calculator and start crunching numbers, trying to find that day.

You go wrong when you dabble with all the rapture ideas, and various forms of millennialism.

You go wrong when you try naming the antichrist

and seeing today's political movements as foretold in Scripture.

But perhaps the most deadly way to go wrong is to talk about the end apart from the cross.

Everything is finished on the cross.
That is the last day.
That is the judgment.
And that alone is what prepares us for the end.

Just follow along in today's Gospel and you'll see that Jesus was speaking of the cross.

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened” (13:24).

A couple chapters later Mark records:

“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” (15:33)

Matthew is the one who tells us about the earthquake, and the rocks splitting,
the tombs of the dead opening and their bodies raising.

The death of Jesus Christ is a cosmic event.
Everything in heaven above and earth below is shaken to its core.

For here on the Cross true God and true man dies.
The unthinkable, unimaginable, incomprehensible happens:
God dies.

And so it makes perfect sense why Jesus says:

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”
(13:30).

That isn't some cryptic message,
it doesn't need any symbolic interpretation.

He spoke these words directly to Peter and James, John and Andrew (13:3).
They saw all these things take place.
They saw the Son of Man coming in power and glory—
but unlike any power or glory they'd ever seen before.

The power and glory of God were hidden behind the weakness and suffering of the cross.
The power was a self-restrained power.
The glory was a self-giving glory.

All of His divinity was held back, kept in check, and laid in the tomb to rest.

Imagine also Peter's thoughts when he recalled Jesus' words:

“Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows...” (13:35).

Thinking back on that eventful night,

Peter surely would've remembered falling asleep at the Mount of Olives.
 He would've remembered his guilt and remorse when that rooster crowed.
 He would've remembered his denial, his lack of faith, his unpreparedness.

But then he would have also remembered Jesus' mercy—
 that look of compassion and forgiveness.

He would've remembered the blood that was shed, the body that was given,
 the life that was won.

He would've remembered that Day as the great and awesome day of the Lord!
 Everything was accomplished on that day.
 Nothing was left out.
 No one was left out.

And so it is for you.

Your last day was known and decided on that cross.
 Judgment day has already come. Sheep and goats are already sorted.
 On that cross the Lord has sent out His angels and gathered from the four corners of the earth all
 His elect, all those whom He has called unto Himself.

On that day our Lord snatched you from the fire!
 It was for you He ran into the burning house, for you He gave His life for yours.

Will there be another day? A last day? A second coming?
 Yes. That's how we've learned to confess it in our creeds:
 "And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead."

He will come again.
 And as Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, James and John, "Stay awake!"
 So also He says to you, "Stay awake." "Be ready."

And our readiness is our trust that all is done already in Christ.
 To stay awake is to trust that your salvation is already won on the cross,
 and delivered to you in the Sacraments.

With this trust, this faith received from Christ, then you are ready and alert to save others.

That's how Jude in his epistle for today puts it:
 "Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others
 show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." (Jude (22-23))

The house is burning, the end is at hand, save others, snatch them from the fire.
 For they too must know that in Christ all is done and ready and forgiven.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit