

As we approach the end of the calendar year we also approach the end of the church year. We look around us, and we see the leaves falling off the trees, it's getting colder, and we're getting less and less sunlight as the days progress. Winter is coming, you don't need a calendar to tell you that. It seems the world around us is dying.

Likewise, as the northern hemisphere approaches winter, the Church discusses its winter. On this last Sunday in the church year, we discuss the end times. Eschatology which is a fancy word for words about the end times. We gather together to hear from our Lord about what will happen in these end times. **IN THESE END TIMES, THE HOLY SPIRIT KEEPS US AWAKE FOR CHRIST'S IMMINENT RETURN THROUGH HIS WORD AND SACRAMENT.**

First, **I. We live in the end times which started at Christ's ascension.** When we hear these things about the end times. We say to ourselves, "We got time!" We want to think that the end times are five years away, ten, or two hundred. We want the end times to start after I get married, once I retire, or once my kids finally move out of the house. We don't want the end times to be now.

But Jesus sternly warns us saying. **"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."** What are these things? These things are the things described earlier in chapter 13. Wars and rumors of wars. Many false saviors coming claiming to be the Messiah. Persecution of Christians and family strife with brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers betraying one another over Christ.

Jesus continues in our text, **"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."** As we look at this checklist of items, all of these things have already happened and have been happening. These things are things that we're already in the midst of. And these are things that have happened in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension.

As Christ hung on the cross the sun refused to shine, the earth quaked, and **"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,"** We see many of these things happening in Christ's death.

So too with Christ's resurrection, we see that Christ is **"the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** This imagery of firstfruits is like a marathon, when you see the first runner cross the finish line, the others are not long to follow. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, the others are not long to follow. We too will be raised with Christ when He comes again. At His Ascension, Jesus gave them a charge to go to the ends of the Earth with this message.

And authors of the Epistles tell us that the end is near. Peter tells us this in His first letter. **"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers."** James likewise writes, **"You**

also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” And Jesus tells us, **“So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”**

The end times are not later, they are now. They have been happening for centuries. So we need not look for red herrings of the end times: a red heifer, the reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem, or a secret rapture of taking away of the faithful before a series of dramatic apocalyptic events. Jesus is telling us to stay awake and be ready. Why? II. Christ's return is imminent and known only to the Father.

Jesus tells us He is at the very gates. He tells us be on your guard, keep awake, stay awake. He gives us the parable of a master leaving on a journey and the need for the servants to stay ready. He tells us **“And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”** He isn't saying this just to the disciples, or people born five generations after you, He is saying this to all of us. All of us need to be ready, all of us need to prepare for his imminent return. Christ could return by the time I snap my fingers.

What does that look like? One of the words here “keep awake” in verse 33 is literally field sleep. Have you ever tried to sleep in a field? Even tent camping: the first night you kind of enjoy the crickets and the stars, but by the next night you want your warm bed and bedroom with four walls. People who sleep in fields sleep with one eye open for coyotes and other threats. Christ calls us to sleep with one eye open spiritually as we await His return.

Likewise, Jesus tells us three times to stay awake. This word can also be translated as “watch.” For those of you with the NIV translation or the King James, that's what you'll read. Which I believe is also a good translation for this. The word means to rise, to stay upright. It's hard to sleep while standing. And Jesus tells us not just to watch once then we're done, but to keep on watching, to be the kind of people who are spiritually awake and alert for his second coming. Jesus' return is imminent.

Jesus also tells us, **“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** I know this boggles our minds because we know that the Father is God and Jesus is God, the Trinity in unity, so how can Jesus not know? All sorts of theologians who are smarter than me have a better idea than I do, but suffice it to say that this is just a mystery of the Trinity.

Do you remember the Beatles? Not the bug, but the band. John Lennon of the Beatles got into trouble by saying the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Essentially, that they were bigger than Jesus.

Throughout history, many Christians have tried to predict the end of the world. In the year 1,000 people freaked out and sold all they had because they took

the Biblical thousand years in Revelation literally. A group in the 1800s called the Millerites predicted the second coming to October 22, 1844. That group now makes up the modern seventh day Adventists. Harold Camping predicted the end of the world on September 6, 1994, then 29 then October 2. Most recently he predicted the end of the world to be May 21, 2011. Perhaps you remember some of the hubbub about that around ten years ago.

But it doesn't matter who you are or how shiny your shoes are. If Jesus said He doesn't know the timing of the end of the world, why would you? Just like John Lennon did, anyone predicting the end of the world with confidence is in effect saying they are bigger than Jesus and likely want to be more popular. Don't touch such false prophets with a ten foot pole.

But Jesus tells us again because nobody but the Father knows: **“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”** Don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today. We are in the end times right now. Turn and believe in Jesus Christ.

Yet despite all these warnings, we can take heart because III. The Holy Spirit keeps us awake by immersing us in His Word and Sacraments. The fact of the matter is that we cannot possibly stay awake for the second coming of Christ. Luther tells us, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” The Holy Spirit prepares us for the second coming of Christ.

A good teacher never throws any curveballs come test time. If you took notes and studied the material, come test day, you simply can put down on paper what the teacher has been feeding you the whole time.

In Christ's Church, He gives us His Holy Spirit to feed us spiritually so that we can welcome Christ with open arms at His return. He feeds us through His Word and Sacrament.

Listen to His Word which calls you to repentance for your sins. It tells you to turn from your pet sins. It tells you with Christ's return imminent and unknown, there's no time to waste. Don't wait until next week to kick that bad habit, today is the day. Don't wait until after graduation, after the kids move out of the house, or after you retire to become an every Sunday church attendee, the stakes are too high.

Listen to His Word which tells you of Jesus Christ who suffered the end times wrath of the Father on the cross. All of the judgment that you deserve was endured by Christ on the cross. Because of that end time judgment that Christ suffered, the second coming of Christ is nothing to worry about.

Listen to His Word which proclaims His resurrection, saying that death and judgment was not the end of Him, but the Father raised Him up again never to die

again, and that is also our fate and our destiny, to live in a world without sin, pain, or sorrow because of Jesus.

Live in your Baptism wherein the Father has claimed you as His own and in which Jesus calls you a brother. Receive that gift wherein you have been clothed in robes of righteousness so that on the day of judgment when your guilty conscience calls out, “Hey, remember that time—” the Father interrupts, “Forget about that, you are mine, you are forgiven.”

Come to the Lord’s Supper often which strengthens you in the true faith until life everlasting. This meal of which we are about to partake is a foretaste of the feast to come, the marriage feast of the lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

All of these things are the staying awake that Jesus commands us to do in this text. All of these things are the watching for and the welcoming of Jesus who is that coming king. We live in the end times; we have been for nearly 2,000 years now. Nonetheless, Christ’s return is imminent.

But when the Holy Spirit instills in us a watchfulness and alertness through His Word and Sacrament, when that day comes of Christ’s second return, we’ll find that we’re ready.

We see that sleep in a field word elsewhere in the Bible: “**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account...**” Like a shepherd, I’ve been given the charge to sleep in a field with my sheep. And it gives me great joy to see the flock gathered together like we are today. I love to feed you with God’s Word and I love to feed you with the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

I sometimes lose sleep over the parishioners I haven’t seen or heard from in a while. I stay awake, I field-sleep. I pray and think about those who haven’t been here. If you or a loved one ever gets a call or a letter from me or an elder. It’s never because we need more dollars in offering plates or we have some quota of butts in pews to make quarterly goals.

It’s always because I care for you. I want you to stay spiritually awake in these gray and latter days. I want you to be ready. I want you at the Lord’s table today so I can join you at the Lord’s table at the marriage feast of the lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

In these end times where Christ’s return is imminent, the Holy Spirit has everything you need to be ready. Listen to these words, and come and eat for the feast is spread. Amen!