

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 256, 11-29-2020 † Advent 1

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MARK 13

³² “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”



We love Christmas carols. There are many of them, a vast treasury. Just turn on the right radio station and they cycle through all the classics from the past 50-60-70 years. Of course, some carols go back much further. They all get us ready for Christmas in some way, shape, or form.

That’s what the season of Advent seeks to do – get us ready for Christmas. The Savior of the world must come. But He comes not just once; He comes twice. First at Christmas, second at the end of all things, the Last Day. So we need to be prepared with more than balls of holly.

This year, for Advent, we will look to Christmas carols to hook us, but we look to God’s Word to book us – to convict us and console us.

Over 150 years ago, Rev. Benjamin Russell Hanby wrote a Christmas favorite. Written in 1864 for a church sing-along, Hanby house in Westerville, OH, we have been singing, “*Up On The Housetop, Click! Click! Click!*” ever since.

Here are a few lines from that fun carol:

- “Fill little Nell and Will’s stockings well,”
- There’s a dolly that laughs and cries,
- Will gets a hammer and ball and whip.

What joy! Then why is our sermon text so somber? Well, that is because some people see Santa as the savior of Christmas, the reason to fall asleep late and maybe catch him making an appearance in your own fireplace. But nothing is as serious as the Son of Man catching us *asleep* and *faithless* at the end of time. So He is ...

The Only Savior To Stay Up For

Mark 13 happens on Tuesday morning of holy week, just two days before Jesus’ arrest and trial. People have commented on the magnificent temple complex, so Jesus decides to talk about the end of time and again preach about His second coming. Jesus emphasizes, “*Watch! Be alert!*”

It’s not very complicated. He has not left behind some code to break. He has not said this with a wink and a nudge. Jesus says, “*No one knows about that day or hour*” (v32). “*No one knows.*”

People are the worst at this. They can check the weather but fail to see the times. False prophets come and make predictions. Do you know how many have tried before? Harold Camping was a radio preacher who suggested ’94, then ’95, then ’11, and finally ’12 before he gave up. William Miller, the founder of 7th-Day Adventists, predicted 1843, then again 1844. Even in ancient times Christians were attempting this. Irenaeus and Hippolytus of Rome added up the dimensions of the ark and decided the world would end in the year 500. What do each of these predictions tell us? It is that Christ’s coming cannot be predicted.

It’s okay to admit we do not know when. Why? Because the angels in heaven don’t even know. Even the Son of Man, Jesus Christ Himself, has set aside the knowledge. His enemies often felt His timing was quite wrong, considering healings or picking grain on the Sabbath. Very simply put, no one knows.

Compare that to the coming of someone in our Christmas carol. There is a scheduled day, Dec. 24, sometime after dark, when we expect the clicking of reindeer feet. Santa knows when he is coming. But it’s not something to warn

the sleepy. All Santa is going to do is leave presents. And by design, Santa doesn't want you to witness his coming.

Jesus is very clear, "*Watch! Be alert and pray. Keep watch!*" He says it and repeats it. What does Jesus mean by all that? We remember His first coming. We celebrate the battle He fought for us as true God but also true man. We fight the battles in front of us: distraction, temptation, and complacent living.

Our lives are like night. We live through a sleepiness that enshrouds us, the slumber of sin. The devil attempts to turn the lights off on God's promise, so that we get tired of God's promises. We get involved in this world and start to lose the tightness of our grip on who Jesus was and what He has done for us. Nothing is quite as effective on our hearts as pleasures and wealth, for when our stomachs are full, then our needs are removed, and we stop looking to God.

That is the other reason why it's okay to admit we do not know when Jesus is coming again. If we knew, then we might be lulled into sin and distraction. Before it's too late, we might fall from grace because we loved the world. Instead, Jesus wants us to be ready. The only way to be ready is by faith alone.

By faith alone, not knowing exactly when He will come is a delightful expectation.

- Revelation 19:7, "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! The wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*"
- Romans 13:11, "*Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*"
- 1 Peter 4:7, "*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*"

"Up on the Housetop" is a great tune. We wait for the "click-click-click" as the heavenly arrival from above. We wait for the "ho-ho-ho" to warn of a messenger with gifts. But that messenger hopes that we will be asleep so as not to catch him.

Who is the greater arrival from above? Who is the Messenger with gifts we await in faith? He is no more than a baby. He is no less than a Redeemer. He is the Savior again. We have all night. Jesus says to be ready. Jesus is also the one who makes us ready, through Word and sacrament. Not Santa! He just brings presents. Not angels! They just keep us safe. Jesus, Jesus – only Jesus; in His name, Amen.