

Mark 13:26-37

Advent 1; December 3 & 4, 2023

You know it's coming. Are you ready for it? Ready for what? Three weeks from today is Christmas Eve. Are you ready? Perhaps, you are that type of person who can answer: *"Yes, I am."* Your Christmas letter is all written out and printed on the Christmas stationary. Your cards went into the mail on the day after Thanksgiving. Maybe you are that person who has all their Christmas shopping done? Or maybe you're one of those people who do their shopping on Christmas Eve? Are the gifts all wrapped up? Tree up and decorated? Everything ready? Or not even started? Are you ready? The day is coming and you can't stop it.

Are you ready for the storm? When we lived in Florida many years ago, we would keep our eyes on the weather forecast very closely when a new tropical storm or hurricane would begin to form. Even though we were not on either coast, a big enough storm could still cause some serious damage. As it would get closer to land, the track got more certain. We may not watch the track of hurricanes here in Wisconsin, but we might prepare for a powerful snowstorm heading directly toward us. Yet, just like a hurricane, there is nothing that can stop it. It is coming!

On Sunday, April 14, 1935 (Palm Sunday), people across the plains of America – in Kansas, Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle – woke up to a bright and clear morning. It looked like it was going to be a bright and sunny day. There hadn't been many of them at that time. The skies were often gray and hazy in those days. The middle part of the country had been suffering from a horrific drought. There had been many dust storms. The dust was so bad at times, that people would even die from "dust pneumonia." It often was hard to even breathe with all the dust in the air. The country was also in the middle of the Great Depression. Just when things looked as if they could not get any worse, they were about to get much worse on April 14th, 1935.

There was a dust storm that was brewing like nothing that had been seen before. It had started further up in the middle of the country. By the time the dust storm got to the panhandle of Oklahoma, it had become a mountain of dust that was a mile high and 200 miles wide. They had never seen a dust storm like this. On that "Black Sunday," people thought that the world was coming to an end. As the storm raged on that day, one woman reportedly even contemplated killing her baby rather than have it face Armageddon. As it picked up speed and more and more dust, there was nothing that could stop it. For the people who lived in Oklahoma and Texas, there was nothing that anyone could do to stop it. In all of these events, there is and was nothing that anyone could do to stop it. Therefore, it begs the question: What will you do with the information?

Jesus wanted his disciples and the people he was talking to that day to know that an end was coming to this world. There was nothing that anyone could do to stop it. No one would even know when it was coming. But it was coming! Jesus speaks, in our text speaks about the signs that would precede that end. **"But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."** **"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."** In a few verses before our text, Jesus also lists some additional signs: **"Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."** As you look at that list of signs, most of them have been fulfilled for a long time already. Jesus' point is simple: He is coming back and there is nothing you can do to stop it. The only question that needs to be asked: Is what are you going to do with that information? Do you ignore it? Do you not believe it? Do you wait for it? Or, do you prepare for it?

Jesus understands how hard it is to wait. He understands the temptations that we will face when we don't see him come back as fast as we would like. He understands the challenge his long delay presents to our faith. So, he says: **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."**

Don't you love winter in Wisconsin? The snow and the cold might be okay for a while, but sometimes it seems to go on forever. Don't you love the days becoming almost dark by 4pm? The nights can just seem to go on so long. But we all know that eventually summer will come. Winter will come to an end. The buds will once again come out on the trees. The flowers will come back up out of the ground. The grass will return to its green color again. Jesus doesn't want us to fear that last day. There is only 1 way for us to be ready. You see in Christ we have everything we need. Nothing can take that away from you. Storms, Satan and evil cannot stop him from coming back.

Some may fear that day. Jesus wanted his followers to know that this day was not a day to be feared. It will be a day to look forward. A day that we can rejoice in. Jesus wanted his disciples to know just how much he loved them. He wants us to know how much he loves you. There is not a single promise that God has not kept. Even if the world seems so dark around you, Jesus is still the Light of the world. He will take all those dark clouds away.

In 536 AD, a mysterious fog/darkness plunged Europe, the Middle East and parts of Asia into darkness for 18 months. It was one of the worst periods of time to be alive in that part of the world. Temperatures fell year-round. Crops failed. Snow fell in areas and times when it shouldn't. The cause of the darkness? A massive volcanic eruption in Iceland. It created a huge cloud that resided high in the atmosphere over that part of the world. Eventually, over 18 months, the sky became clear. The sun began to once again shine. There was nothing that anyone could do about that cloud.

As we look around this world, we can see the darkness of sin. There will be Christmas' that will not be the perfect Christmas. There will be storms and hurricanes that we cannot stop. So, what do with all that information? Share it and trust it. We trust in Jesus. There is a time coming when he once again will return. He wants us to take heart and be encouraged by his promise to return. May God bless us when he returns to take us home to heaven. Amen.