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The Last Sunday of the Church Year

The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

From Advent to end time we remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is our gospel. We thank God for enabling us once again to complete the Christian Church Year which proclaims the life and message of Jesus.

Sermon
Mark 13:26-37

Wonder...Wait...Work...Watch

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.

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.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

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!

Introduction: No church you've ever seen in person or in pictures has the prominence that the temple in Jerusalem had. The temple was where God showed up and it was the only place where God showed up. The temple was where priests offered sacrifices to God, the only place they did that. The temple sacrifices were the heart of Old Testament religion. The sacrifices pointed Old Testament believers to the perfect and final sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world.

No one understood the temple better than Jesus. When he walked past the temple on Tuesday before he died—that's where today's Gospel takes us—he knew the temple was about to be done. In three days he would become the sacrifice that took away the sins of the world. No need for sacrifices anymore; no need for the temple anymore. Jesus hadn't been able to convince the Jews of that; they weren't ready to be done with the temple, no way. So God took care of that. 37 years later God sent the Roman general Titus and 60,000 soldiers to attack Jerusalem. The siege lasted four horrific months. In the end Titus destroyed the city and flattened the temple. The Roman army slaughtered a million people.

Jesus saw it all coming. As he walked past the magnificent temple on that Tuesday afternoon, he said to his disciples, **Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.** Well, that blew their minds. Later on they asked Jesus: **Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?** What Jesus could see about Jerusalem wasn't pretty; more like gruesome and grisly. And then he said—and we heard him say it in today's Gospel: **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. Jesus saw the details and he even saw the date. A 1500-year era was ending. No more chosen nation. No more symbols and sacrifices, no more temple. Jesus Christ was on the scene. The Old Testament era was over and General Titus added the exclamation point. But then Jesus said this: **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.** The old era would be gone. but God wasn't finished. A new era was beginning.

And that's the era you and I live in. It's the New Testament era and it's about 2,000 years old. We're not so concerned about the Old Testament era; it's interesting but it doesn't really affect us. But we're extremely interested in the New Testament era— that's us! On that Tuesday in Jerusalem, Jesus could see both eras. And he could see the end of both eras. He saw the end of the Old Testament era and he saw the end of the New Testament era. And he tells us what he sees.

We've spent the last year talking about the New Testament era. The Christian Church Year helps us do that. In Advent we heard Gabriel inform Mary about the birth of her divine Son. We rejoiced over Jesus' birth last Christmas. We listened to John the Baptizer prepare us for his coming and we watched John baptize Jesus in the Jordan River. We listened to Jesus' early sermons and witnessed his miracles. In Lent we heard him confront his enemies. In Holy Week he remembered his suffering and death. On Easter Sunday we heard the voice of a living Jesus. On Pentecost we remembered that he chose us and equips us to preach the gospel to every creature. All through the summer and into the fall we listened and learned how Jesus wants us to live our lives as Christians. We do the same thing every year. You and I live and breathe in the New Testament era—it's all about Jesus and it's all about us. But now we're done. This is the last Sunday of the Church Year. We know how the old era ended: we can almost see the flames and smell the smoke of a burning temple. But how will our era end? What will the end of our era be like? Jesus has four words for us in today's Gospel:

Wonder...Wait...Work...Watch

Jesus says **Wonder**. **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.** We don't have to wonder about this. We will wonder at this. Like we stand there with awe and absolute amazement, like with our eyes as wide as dinner plates and our hair standing up on the back of our necks. Like I can't believe what I'm seeing but I'm actually seeing it. We will see Jesus dressed in his Savior clothes and his Redeemer robes appearing in the skies with the kind of brilliance that makes a nuclear explosion look like a pop gun. And we will see all the angels of heaven flying and floating over creation picking out and picking up every last man, woman, and child who believed in Jesus. And we'll see bodies coming out of their graves and bodies coming back together out of their urns or bodies rising from the waters where they drowned or the ashes where they burned. We will be speechless! But then our speechlessness will turn into shouts of joy as we stand at the gates of paradise. As we think about our era coming to a close. Jesus says: **Stand in wonder just thinking about it!**

Jesus says **Wait**. **But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. You do not know when that time will come.** So your grandpa says, "I'll come and watch your game," but he never does. You get used to it. Or your grandson says, "I'll come and mow your lawn," but he never does. You get used to it. Or the lady next door says, "I'll come and help you out," but she never does. You get used to it. Sometimes Jesus seems to be like your grandpa or your grandson or your neighbor. He says, "I'm coming," but he hasn't. You get used to it. Jesus isn't like that. He's coming; we just don't know when. He could come back while I'm still alive, so he better hurry up. He could come back when you're still live, which means he has more time. He could come back when we're all dead! I don't have a clue and neither do you. But Jesus is coming back. Jesus says: **Wait!**

Jesus says **Work**. **It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.** Being a Christian isn't like waiting for a bus; you don't stand around with your hands in your pockets. It's not like being put on hold. You don't sit there and stare at your phone. Jesus has work for us to do. Robert Frost stopped by the woods on a snowy evening, but he knew the realities: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep." You and I have miles to go before we sleep. We have children to care for, parents to listen to, teachers to learn from. We have neighbors to help out and jobs to succeed at and futures to save for. We have careers to prepare for, perhaps even careers as pastors and teachers. We have loved ones to pray for and friends to witness to. We have

ministries to plan and offerings to give. Jesus is coming, but this is no time to sit around, no time to be laid back, no time to be lazy. The Lord has put us in charge of his kingdom and has given us all jobs to do. Jesus says **Work!**

Jesus says **Watch. Be on guard! Be alert. 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!** OK, friends. This is where it gets really serious. It's so easy to fall asleep. Our sinful nature lulls us to doze off. Our society fills our minds with soft and soothing music. The devil feeds us warm milk laced with sleeping pills. Sleep happens. Think how many people we know, people in our families, people in our confirmation classes, have drifted off and drifted away from Jesus. We need to watch. We need to recognize our sins every day and be honest that our sins condemn us before God. We need to look to Jesus every day and hear his forgiving voice and his loving promises. We need to remember and relive our baptisms where Jesus adopted us into his family. We need to hear and study his Word where Jesus gives us guidance and power. We need to receive Jesus' body and blood in which he forgives our sins and strengthens our faith. We don't need Mountain Dew or Red Bull to watch for Jesus. We just need to keep our eyes on Jesus and we'll be ready to receive him when he comes again. Jesus says **Watch!**

The end of the era is coming. You can expect that you will see it with deep **wonder**. Be patient and **wait**. Sooner or later Jesus is going to come for you. **Work** while it is day before the night comes when no one can work. Keep your eyes and your hearts open and **Watch**. Wonder, wait, work, and watch and you will find yourself with Jesus forever when this era ends. Amen.