

Mark 13:32-37

Today we are entering into the **festival** half of the church year, and the season which we call **Advent**. Advent is a time when we change our church paraments to **blue**, when we bring out a **wreath** with special **candles** on it, and when people (especially children) get really **excited** - because **Christmas** is just around the corner. Advent is a time of joyful **anticipation**, but it is also a time of patient **waiting**. It's a time when we eagerly **prepare** to celebrate the **birth** of our Savior on Christmas morning. But it's **also** a time when we patiently **wait** for Him to return **again** on the **Judgment Day**, as He **promised** He would. One way or the other, **Jesus is coming**, and, as we've been hearing here at Trinity the last few weeks, we want to be **ready**. The thought of **getting ready** for a big occasion, like a visit from **Jesus**, can leave us with many different **feelings** inside. In some ways you never really **feel** as though you are totally **prepared**. It's kind of like when there is going to be a **baptism**, or a **confirmation**, or a **wedding** in your family - so many people are going to be **visiting** - everybody in the family gets **stressed** and **uptight** - and **everything** in your house needs to be **cleaned** or **updated** or maybe even given a complete **make-over** before the big event arrives.

It also occurred to me that in another way the Advent season is like the feeling which a husband and wife experience, as they wait for the **birth** of a **child**. When you know you are having a baby (or grandbaby), it's a very **happy** and **exciting** time. And yet, while you have approximately nine months to **prepare** for the little arrival, the day-to-day **waiting** - especially if that baby stubbornly goes **past** its **due date** - can be very **nerve-wracking** and **frustrating**. We **hate** to **wait**. We want to know **when** - **exactly** when that little visitor is going to **arrive**. And that becomes **especially** true when the visitor who is **coming** happens to be **Jesus** - a visitor whose arrival will mark the **end of the world** as we now know it!

But while Jesus makes it very clear to us that He definitely **will** return, He also makes it very clear that it's not possible for us to know **when** He will return. Our text today begins, "*No one **knows** about that day or hour, not even the **angels** in heaven, nor the **Son**, but only the **Father**.*" Even Jesus' **disciples** had been **curious** about when He would return to the earth. But, our heavenly Father has made that knowledge **His** business **alone**. God the Father has reserved to **Himself** the exact date and time of the **Last Day** - the **Judgment Day**. Besides, the Lord Jesus assures us that the **timing** of the Last Day is not something for us to **worry** about. It's far **better** for us to be concerned about **using** the time we have **profitably** - however **long** or **short** that time may be. So, in our text today, Jesus uses a story about a man and his servants, to **illustrate** that we are to **Eagerly**

Watch For The LORD's Return. Such watchfulness will do two things for us, and **both** of them are **profitable** for us. As we eagerly watch for our Lord's return, Jesus will provide us with **security** against the forces which try to lead us **away** from Him, and He will also provide us with opportunities to **exercise** our **faith**, so it will remain **strong** and **viable**.

Jesus' story begins like this: *"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**."* Let's focus on this **doorkeeper** for a moment. About the only places you can find doormen **today** are in luxury **hotels**. The **function** of a doorkeeper is to provide **protection**. He needs to **keep watch** to make sure nobody gets into the **building** who isn't **supposed** to be there. On a more **local** level, we might use **security guards** or sophisticated **alarm systems** to provide protection for our **homes** and **businesses**. But, can you imagine anyone putting in a **security** system that **didn't work**? Can you imagine anyone installing an **alarm** system which was **not capable** of sounding an **alarm** - either audibly, visibly, or even silently? That wouldn't make much **sense**, would it? It would be like purposely hiring a **security** guard who would regularly **sleep** on the job, or getting yourself a **watchdog** that can't **bark**. That wouldn't provide much **security**, **would** it? It's the very **purpose** of a security system - whether it is **electrical**, or **human**, or **animal** - to **keep watch** at all times, and to **sound** the **alarm** when it's needed.

As followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and members of His Church on earth, we are also **doorkeepers**, and as such, we've been given the responsibility to **keep watch**. The Psalmist viewed this particular profession as a very **desirable** one. He wrote, *"I would **rather** wait at the **doorway** of the house of my **God** than **dwell** in the tents of the **wicked**."* Our **souls** and our **faith** must be constantly **guarded** against the foes who would try to **harm** them. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh continually strive to lead us into situations which are **dangerous**. If you don't think that can **happen** to **you** or to the people **around** you, then you are probably not being a very good **watchman**. Jesus exhorts us to **open** our eyes - to **look around** and **see** all the people whose lives are being **devastated** by the abuse of alcohol and other drugs - to observe the **loneliness** and **confusion**, the **stress** and **frustration**, the inability to **cope** with the **rigors** and **temptations** of daily life - **all** of which lead many people into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful **sins**. And recognize that if it can happen to **others**, it can also happen to **us**. And perhaps **worst** of all, we don't know **when** it will happen. We need to be **on guard** against the evils of this world - always **watchful** for things which pose a danger to our souls - always **rooted** in God's **Word** and **Sacraments** - always **ready** to

sound the alarm at a moment's notice. We must be **good doorkeepers** in the Lord's house.

But, notice that Jesus' story involves **more** people than just **doorkeepers**. **Each** servant has his own special **task** to perform while the homeowner is away - perhaps one does the **cleaning**, another prepares the **meals**, yet another keeps the house in good **repair**, and so forth. Each servant is required to focus on his particular **job**, so that **all** the jobs will get done, and so that there won't be any **wasted time** because of an undue **overlap** in their efforts.

Doing our assigned tasks gives **each** of us the opportunity to **exercise** our **faith**, and to keep it **strong** and **viable**. I'm sure you all realize that there are **lots** of different ways to **exercise** your **body**. Some people will **run**, others will **swim** - some will lift **weights**, others will do **calisthenics** - some will be able to do these things on their **own**, others will need a **personal trainer**, or a membership at a local **health club**. Each person will **customize** their exercise program, in order to do **whatever** it takes for **that person** to stay fit. And yet, when it comes to staying **spiritually** fit - to keeping our **faith** strong and viable - God says there is only **one** way to do it. It's the **same** way that keeps us **safe** from the spiritual dangers that surround us. It only happens through the **faithful use** of God's **Word** and **Sacraments**.

Keeping those **Means of Grace** as the **most important** tools in our lives will help us to be **watchful** and **alert** as we anticipate our Lord's **return**. Our text **concludes** with these words, "*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**. If he comes **suddenly**, do not let him find you **sleeping**. What I say to you, I say to **everyone**: **Keep watch!***"

A **quick** reading of these words might leave us with the impression that all of this man's servants were **lazy** and **slothful** - that they wouldn't **carry out** their assigned tasks until the **last** possible moment. But a more **careful** reading would indicate that the homeowner simply **expects** his servants to be **faithful**. **Watchfulness** demands **activity** at all times. So, regardless of whether the homeowner would return in broad **daylight**, or even during one of the four watches of the **night**, he would expect to find his servants **working** - **performing** the various tasks which had been assigned to them.

Our Lord Jesus expects **no less** from **us**. He has left **us** with the responsibility and the privilege of taking care of His **house** - His **business** here on

the earth. That means He has left each of us with some **tasks** to perform. What **are** those tasks? Well, by God's **design**, there are different **tasks** for different **servants**. But while our **tasks** are **different**, our **purpose** is still the **same**. **Each** of us is to **contribute** to the good of the entire **household**, by **using** the gifts which God has given to us - and by using those gifts **now, before** He returns.

As servants of our Lord, we are **all** required to be **watchful** - to be **active** and **prepared** for His return. Jesus our Savior is coming! We don't know how **soon** it will be, but every day that **passes** is one day **closer**. And **whenever** Jesus returns, may He **not** find us **sleeping** - resting on our **laurels** so to speak. Rather, may He find us actively **using** the gifts and talents which He has so graciously provided. May He find us faithfully **doing** the things which He has commanded us to do. Dear friends, **Eagerly Watch For The LORD's Return** - be **faithful** in your use of His **Word** and **Sacrament**. And in **doing** so, you will be kept **safe** from the dangers that threaten your soul, and you will be **exercising** your faith to keep it **strong** and **viable**. Amen.