

How Will We Know...How long?

Isaiah 64:1–9

- Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19
- 1 Corinthians 1:3–9
- Mark 13:24–37

“And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” Mk. 13:37

We had someone in our church in Germany who was really into end times predictions and had interpreted different so-called signs and dates and prophecies in the Bible and preached to us that the time was now very near. That was 20 years ago.

The context in the Mark passage has to do with the end of times when Jesus will return. There are many theories and predictions out there about when that will be. Some groups have been so sure that they knew Christ’s return date, that they gathered in a location and literally waited. As you know, all of those groups have been 100% wrong about their predictions because we’re all still here and Jesus hasn’t returned.

Even though I do not personally see the point of trying to figure out exactly when Jesus might return, I do see value in a posture of hopeful anticipation and even a sense of wanting to make sure we've done everything we can to be ready. One of our German friends talked about engaging with the world as if it’s our last day while going about it with the most calm possible.

The end of the passage in Mark that we heard today, Jesus says keep awake. What does it mean to keep awake and also wait on/for the Lord? Is it a passive twiddling of the thumbs and staying caffeinated enough not to doze off?

In our Scripture today, it seems more like an attitude and action, not sitting doing nothing. Perhaps Jesus was foreshadowing the time in his near future when he would be in anguish, praying to surrender his own will, and hoping that his disciples would stay awake, stay watching, stay with him in his time of need.

Members of the household in Mk continue their daily work but with a watchfulness. An expectancy. Maybe some fear of knowing what would happen if they were found to be sloughing off. They were waiting with purpose.

Is. 40:31 They that wait upon the Lord/wait for the Lord/that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength.

This passage suggests that in the waiting, our strength is renewed.

What kind of waiting on the Lord would renew our strength? What kind of attitude, what kind of action goes along with that?

Sit and ponder that. ~silence~

Waiting on the Lord is more like a waitress/er waiting on tables, actively serving, watching for when he/she needs to welcome the guests, take their order, watching for when the food is ready and serving it and then bringing them the bill

when they are finished. It takes noticing, watching, serving. But also not rushing people, but being sensitive to timing.

I wonder if anyone thought about anything from the series we just did--Marks of the church series—prayer, worship, sacraments—one of which is the Lord's Supper. As a church we do these rituals and practices together. We believe that something happens in us and in the unseen realm, or before God's throne. Images from Revelation 5 talk about prayers going into the throne room of God. "the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

Prayer matters!

Prayer, worship, sacraments help us to let go of our timing, our desires and puts God back in the center of our thoughts and actions.

Notice also who the object of our waiting is—the Lord. Not waiting for other people to think like I think, or for me to push myself to agree with everyone else.

No, the one we are waiting for or waiting upon is the Lord. Waiting on the Lord to move people's hearts, to move our own hearts.

None of us know when or even if all of us will ever agree on what we should do as a church. And none of us know when or even if any of us will ever feel certain about what should happen with this little church.

What would it look like for you right now to orient yourself to waiting on the Lord?

~silence~

Being alert, watchful, open to revelation in God's time.

The season of Advent is an invitation to continue to serve God and serve one another as we open ourselves to God's communication to us, through us. It will take a deeper level of trust that God will take care of us, that we can hear God's communication with us, that we can remain steadfast and faithful no matter what happens.

Embrace it as a time of recentering. Time of purposeful waiting, of expectancy that Jesus may come into our midst in surprising ways.

And even beyond our little fellowship here, Advent is a season to prepare our hearts and minds for the time when Jesus returns to reconcile all things. To create new heavens and a new earth.

What stories need to be told, songs sung, actions taken, to get ready for Christ's return?

Let's make the waiting good. Seek quiet, seek solitude. Listen. Pray the Scriptures.

Wait with expectancy. Serve the Lord and wait on Him. Watch how your strength is renewed as you wait.

End of sermon is this prayer from 1 Corinthians 1:3–9:

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.