

Mark 13. 24-end Watching and Waiting

The world, it seems, is waiting. We are waiting this year for things we probably haven't ever had to wait for before.

The world is waiting for a vaccine against Covid-19

The world is waiting to see loved ones again, to be able to hug them (when permitted!) and spend time with them.

Up until a few days ago, we have been waiting to see what Boris would say about the arrangements we could all make for Christmas!

But there are also many people waiting for different things - would-be parents are waiting expectantly and excitedly for the day their unborn baby decides that it's time to make an appearance.

Many people are waiting anxiously to find out if they still have a job or if they have a chance of a job interview

Others are waiting in great fear to receive the test result that will say what is wrong with them.

As a church, we are waiting for a new Rector to lead us

And children, of all ages, are waiting for their advent calendars!

The whole world, it seems, is waiting.

Waiting and watching is a strong theme for us as we go into the season of Advent. Today is, as Corinne said last week, the start of the church's new year. Advent, as we've just seen from the video clip, is about expectant waiting, hopeful anticipation and joyful preparation as we watch for Jesus' return.

And, just to set some context to the passage we heard from Mark's gospel, earlier in the chapter Jesus is predicting the fall of Jerusalem which would happen in AD70 when the Romans destroyed the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem.

He tells his disciples that no stone will be left and gives them a prophetic picture of that time, of the events leading up to it. He also talks about future events connected to his return to earth in judgment.

Even Jesus did not know when He would return. This gives us yet another glimpse of His humanity. Only the Father knows that date but he explains that there will be signs to watch out for.

Nature often gives us signs that the seasons are changing. We know that Spring is on its way when the daffodils and tulips start to break through the

soil. Jesus uses the fig tree to explain the same thing for his particular audience. When the tree starts to grow its leaves and its twigs become tender, they know summer is near.

Pete Greig, on one of the Alpha course sessions talks about healing and he says that sometimes we see miracles. Not all the time but sometimes. It's a sign of God's kingdom breaking through and one day everyone will be healed, there will be no more tears and no more pain. For now, we see a sign of things to come of God's work on earth and we find hope in the stories we hear of miraculous signs and wonders.

But we remain in that, now and not yet, stage. We live in the age of the spirit but we continue to wait for Jesus' return when everything will come to completeness.

Jesus tells his disciples to be on guard, to be alert.

To further explain what he meant, Jesus brings us a parable to illustrate it. The owner of the house leaves. He puts his servants in charge. Each of them has an assigned task. The owner tells the one at the door to keep watch.

The act of watching has to be constant because the owner could return at any time. Then there is a warning – do not let him find you sleeping when he returns!

As we look at this picture in more detail we are reminded of several things:

Firstly, God owns everything in the world, He is the owner of the house— it is his creation, not ours. We are merely stewards, but we have been made responsible to care for God's creation.

Secondly, he puts the servants in charge. We are God's servants. Serving God by serving others is what we do.

Thirdly, each of them was assigned a task. I'm reminded at this point of 1 Corinthians 12 which speaks about the body of Christ and each one is a part of it. We have all been given a role to play, tasks to do. However, there are some tasks that we have all been assigned and those tasks came from Jesus himself in the great commission and the great commandment 'love one another, love our neighbour, and to go and make disciples.

Finally, the owner warns the servant at the door to keep watch. Why? – because the owner could return at any time, on any watch, and we are not to be found sleeping when he returns.

One commentator said 'The enemy is delighted to entice us into a settled, cosy routine of worship, prayer and good works so that we become too preoccupied

to be attentive to the fresh challenges, God calls us to'. Now there's a challenge for a Sunday morning!

As a church we are watchmen, doorkeepers if you like. We are protectors of the faith – our job is to stay awake and alert so that we do not come under attack from the enemy who not only wants to divide us but who also wants us to settle into a nice cosy routine with plenty to keep us occupied so that we are not in a position to see what God has next for us!

So, we are not just watching out the for enemy, we are also watching out for God.

Isaiah 62:6-7 'On your walls, Jerusalem, I set watchmen. Day or night they must never be silent. You who keep the Lord mindful must take no rest'. Jesus also says the same thing telling his disciples to 'stay awake' 'watch and pray'.

This is not just waiting at the door whilst reading the paper or chatting with a friend, this is purposefully watching out for any signs, sights and sounds, that the master is on his way back.

The watchmen used to stand on towers and scan the horizons

So, we are to be contemplative prayers allowing space for God to speak to us as a church and then we are to be a prophetic voice in our world as we watch for Jesus' return. I think there are wonderful signs that we are already doing this and this is why we have so many people involved in various aspects of our church ministries, and many folks who are involved out in our community. But Jesus warns us not to become complacent, we must continue to watch, to wait, to pray and to serve.

Advent is not about preparing the house – not about whether we have ordered our new sofas from DFS in time for Christmas (other furniture shops are available by the way!) it's about preparing our hearts for when Jesus returns, it's about being alert to what God is doing in our own lives, in the life of our community and our church. It is about carrying out our assigned tasks as servants of the owner of the house, and we do them with hopeful anticipation, expectant waiting and joyful preparation.

Advent means 'arrival'. Jesus is coming – are we ready?