



When's He Coming Back?

Is this the year Jesus returns?
What happens until he does?

Luke 21: 7-8, 29-36

They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them. Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

Reflection

We've all heard the phrase, "live like there's no tomorrow." Based on the fact that scripture tells us repeatedly to *keep watch* for Christ's return, I think a better theme for followers of Christ is to "live like tomorrow is here."

Christ warned his disciples, and us, not to be taken in by false messiahs and not to become so wrapped up in our earthly lives that our spiritual disciplines falter. As I write this several weeks before Christmas, I'm struck by the irony that *Christmas* is a time when it is *especially* hard to heed Christ's warning! Our culture bombards us with earthly demands, and the false gods at Toys R Us and Best Buy distract us from even considering Jesus in December. As we turn the calendar to January 2007 in just a few days, we recognize that Christ spoke his warning about false gods and spiritual laziness over 2000 years ago. And yet his truth still stands!

Rather than focusing on the timing

or events of the last days, I prefer to rest in the simple knowledge that Christ *will* return – and leave it at that. This is the day, right here, right now, that the Lord has given me – how does he want me to spend it? He has given me a family and friends to love and take care of, as well as spiritual gifts and earthly treasure to use for his purposes. He wants me to invest my earthly life in bringing his Word to others, and to bring whatever measure of comfort I can to those less fortunate than me. He wants me not to waste time worrying about things over which I have no control, and instead, give those concerns to him.

So what happens between now and Christ's return? What if we do as Christ said: *keep watch* by trusting only him, by not over-investing in the world to the detriment of eternity, and by using the gifts he has given us to make a difference for eternity? If we trust him and live by faith, what difference could our lives make in the world?

Readings

Monday, December 25

Mark 13:28-37 How well does your life reflect verse 33? What will you do this week to become better at *keeping watch*?

Tuesday, December 26

Ephesians 6:10-18 How does wearing all of God's armor help us to stay alert and *keep watch*?

Wednesday, December 27

Romans 12: 3-12 In this passage, how does Paul expand upon the idea of *keeping watch*? How, specifically, does he instruct us to do so?

Thursday, December 28

Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 4: 11-16 Paul faithfully *kept watch* over his flock during his ministry. Who are the members of your flock, and how do you minister to them?

Friday, December 29

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Paul encourages us to have a sense of urgency in doing God's work, since time is short. In what ways do you need God's wisdom and power to help you *keep watch*?

On Thanksgiving Eve we introduced our congregation to the Rev. Dr. Robert Mbinda. Dr. Mbinda is serving in Mbeya, Tanzania, a town in the south/central region of that East African nation. Several years ago Father Robert and his wife Mariam took into their home the children of a couple who had both died from the effects of AIDS. Over the course of several years, other children joined them and eventually the numbers grew. To meet the needs of these children, Father Robert left his position as a seminary professor and opened a full-time ministry called Good Samaritan Orphanage. They are currently caring for 79 children and has a plan to grow capacity for 200 children as soon as possible. We have recently been welcomed into partnership with several other congregations to support this ministry.



This partnership is bound to change the lives children who will be the future leaders of Tanzania. It is also bound to change our lives, too. It offers us an up- close and personal connection to the greater needs of this world, a perspective desperately needed by ourselves and by our children.

During this Advent Season, we invite you to give 10%, or a tithe, of the amount you spend on Christmas gifts and celebration to help the meet the basic needs of these orphans in Tanzania: shelter, food, clothing, education, health care, and the love of Christ. **100% of these gifts will be transferred to Good Samaritan Orphanage.**

Give a gift in honor of someone on your Christmas list. Gift cards are available in the church entry or printable from our website www.stjohnmd.org.

Make a donation for your child and give them a gift card in their Christmas stocking. Use it as an opportunity to explain how we can share our blessings with others in need. ***The infant Jesus came for all!***

Make your check out to St. John Lutheran Church and write "Tanzania" in the memo section of your check. A special offering envelope is also available. For more information, please contact Pastor Brian Hughes at Brian@stjohnmd.org or Karen Heist at Karen@stjohnmd.org or call the church office.