**Waiting in the Word**

Based on [Jude 20-25](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jud20) and [Mark 13:24-37](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mk13.24-37)

Preached on November 22, 2015

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

Pentecost 26, Proper 29

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Today is the Last Sunday of the Church Year, sometimes called “Christ the King” Sunday. Our readings emphasize that we are waiting for our King--Christ Jesus--to come again. And this is a good thing; we ought to wait eagerly, hopefully, expectantly for our King to return. The second to last verse of the whole bible reads, “**He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"** This ought to be our prayer always, "Come, Lord Jesus...come quickly."

Is this our prayer? Some people have a bucket list: “Things I want to do or see or experience before I kick the bucket, before I die.” There’s a Country Music song that came out some years back called “Live Like You were dying.” Legend has it that when Julius Caesar read about the life of Alexander the Great he burst into tears, saying “**Have I not just cause to weep, when I consider that Alexander at my age had conquered so many nations, and I have all this time done nothing that is memorable**?” Do you think someone with the attitude of Julius Caesar, someone with an uncompleted “bucket list” can say with honesty and with joy, “Come, Lord Jesus!”?

We are all waiting for our King to return, to judge the world, to dissolve the heavens and the earth with fire, to separate the sheep from the goats, and to deliver us forever. **The question for this Last Sunday of the Church Year is: "What are we to be doing while we wait?"** Is it that God has already secured our salvation, so we should...travel the world, try interesting food, bowl a 300 game, climb a mountain, run a marathon? Since Jesus Christ has shed his blood for your redemption, is your time here to be used for as much recreation as possible before this world is burned away?

No, this world is passing away, its promises are fleeting, it’s joys are temporary. If our hope is in what we accomplish here, we will be destroyed along with our hearts desire. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” If your treasure is in the world, you will be destroyed with it. And so Jesus reminds us in our Gospel reading today, “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away**."

What are we to be doing while we wait for the coming of the King? Jesus says, "Stay awake." He ends his discourse with this admonition, "**What I say to you I say to all, "Stay awake**." That means we are to always remember that this world is coming to an end. It might be in a day or in a thousand years, but stay awake, be sober, don't be seduced into thinking that this world has something permanent to offer you. Your bucket list means nothing in heaven. The places you've traveled, the things you've experienced, all is vanity and striving after wind. And yet the old adage is not true. There is something we will take with us to the grave. The only thing we take with us to heaven, are the words of Jesus.

Do you know what the most important job in the church is? Well, it’s not teaching Sunday School even though children are the future of the church. It’s not making music, though musicians aid us in lifting our praises to God in song. You might think it’s preaching God’s Word which is indispensible for sure, but why is it indispensible,…what is the purpose of preaching, of teaching, of song? The purpose of preaching is to hear. To hear. Friends, the most important job in the church is not to do, but to hear. When Jesus says, “My words will not pass away”, he is telling us precisely to hear his words for they will remain.

Once Jesus was visiting the home of sisters Mary and Martha. Martha was busy preparing for her guest while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, not doing anything except hearing his teaching. Martha, distracted with much serving, is upset with her sister and says, “**Lord, tell my sister to help me**.” Amazing isn’t it? Martha so resents her sister that she commands the Lord himself to rebuke her, because she wasn't "doing" anything. She was just sitting around hearing and not doing. But Jesus says, “**Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”** Mary chose to hear, to hear Jesus words, and he promises they will not be taken away from her. “**Heaven and earth will pass away, [Jesus says], but my words will not pass away**.”

The Canadian national debt is over 600 billion dollars, and it grows by almost 3 million dollars a day. And in the US--arguably the very foundation of the world's economy--the deficit is at 18.6 trillion dollars. You don't need to be a Christian to know that this world is fragile and makes no guarantees, or at least has no right to make them. And especially with terrorism attacking the very foundation of our western civilization, trying to throw us of our rocker...**You could wake up tomorrow and find no groceries on the shelves, no gas at the pumps and your money is just paper or a piece of plastic worth nothing to nobody.** Some economists say to invest in gold or precious metals because they are permanent. They don't perish and they are always worth something. How much more value, then, ought we who know that the only non-perishable thing we have is the word of God. Jesus says, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

If one only knew when that economic collapse would happen, they would stop putting money in the bank and prepare for the new order of things. But no one knows, and so some ignore it, but others prepare. Some fall asleep, but some stay awake. So too Jesus says of the Last Day,

**33**Be on guard, keep awake.*1* ***For you do not know when the time will come***. **34**It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants*2* in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **35**Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows,*3* or in the morning— **36**lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37**And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Awake we are waiting, waiting for the King to come. Amidst wars and rumours of wars, we are waiting; amidst sickness and disease, terrorism and violence, in the words and promises, commands and invitations of our Saviour we are waiting. By the power of the Holy Spirit who sustains us in the evil day, we wait. Awake we wait, but not because of fear. We stay awake because we are excited and eager to see the Lord. On that day Jesus says, "**they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven**" (Mark 13:26-27). We wait in faith.

In our epistle lesson Jude says, "**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy**.." There are two wonderful promises here from the word of God. First is that God is able to keep you from stumbling. The second, he will present you blameless before his presence.

In these last days, there are many temptations that would draw us away from the Lord and his non-perishable Word. Jude says, "**Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to other show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.**" In Jude's day, there were those brothers, church members who had fallen away from the Lord and needed to be "snatched out of the fire." You see, Sin is still a danger, not only to others, but to us in the church. It is a mark of this present age that we regard sin all too lightly--as if it doesn't matter who we commune with, or whether we tell our brother his fault. Sin is serious and we are to treat it as such, as Jude says "**to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by sin.**" Paul says regarding those who practice sexual immorality without repentance, "do not even eat with such a one."

Christ is more powerful than sin to be sure; but sin is still more powerful than us. Therefore, we should never be comfortable with sin, or look the other way, or sweep it under the rug. **It continues to threaten the church and we need to hate it, showing mercy to those lost in the fire, eager to snatch them out and restore them to faith, but with fear.** Elsewhere Paul says, "Work **out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**" So long as we think we are strong enough, secure enough, "Christian" enough to fellowship with sin and not get any on us, we are in grave peril. "**He who would stand, take heed lest he fall.**" But the one who regards sin as a danger that needs to be called out, repented of and forgiven, has the proper fear of the Lord. So long as we hear God's Word we will continue to resist sin, he promises for he is able to keep us from stumbling. Because it is through hearing and believing his words that we receive the Holy Spirit, the one who is strong enough to resist and to overcome. The one whom, as Paul says, "**is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."** The first promise, though the days are evil, God will preserve you in the evil day.

The second promise is this, that when the Lord returns, he will present us blameless before the presence of his glory. The glory of the Lord is not to be trifled with. Isaiah thought he was ruined when he found himself in the presence of the Lord. Peter, when he realized Jesus was God, fell to his knees and asked Jesus to leave saying "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Sinners ought to tremble, "**for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**" (Hebrews 10:31).

But we will not appear before the Lord as sinners...that is not who we are. Yes you sin and it is a part of you, but that is not who you are. You are a new person in Baptism. **You have been clothed with a garment washed in the blood of the lamb and made white, so that when he comes to where you are, you will not be ruined to stand before the throne**. You will not bid him depart, you will not be anxious about your unfinished business here, for all your anxieties will cease. The only business that matters was already taken care of 2000 years ago where, on Calvary's cross, your sin was atoned for and the wrath you deserve was poured out on another. When you see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory you will not sue for more time, but shout Hosanna, Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Alleluia, Lord Jesus, Come quickly.