**Mark 13:24-37**

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, **25** and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **26** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** 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. **28** “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. **29** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. **30**  Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. **31**  Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. **32** “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33**  Be on guard, keep awake. 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 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, 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.”

**“What Then Shall We say?”**

 Grace to you and peace from Him, “who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:8) Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen. The Last Sunday of the Church Year can also be called, “The Sunday of Fulfillment” or “Christ the King Sunday.” These titles do not have the same shock factor as, “The end of the world.” Of course, Hollywood wants big cash and has been more than happy to entertain such a title. This includes all the ways the world could end such as by nuclear fallout, a pandemic, global warming, an asteroid or even the less serious things like alien invasion, a zombie apocalypse, and being Left Behind after the Rapture. All these things and more make one fatal error. The end of the world is somehow and someway in the hands of humanity.

 Of course, this is far from what God says who reigns over His creation. After the flood the Lord promised Noah and all future generations stating, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). Jesus likewise said His second coming would happen during times like before the flood when people, “were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage…” (Matthew 24:38). Frankly, the end of the world has nothing to do with creation or humanity that is more the result. Instead, the end comes by God and His great mystery to when and how this will be, but we know it will all be in the hands of Jesus. So then, what shall we say to such waiting?

 First, we are looking at the situation for what it is! Jesus told His disciples during Holy two different ends. One would be seeing the temple’s destruction in Jerusalem forty years later. The other would be an end far more reaching, far more devastating to all of creation. A bleak world God will at last deliver into chaos. Not even the cosmic powers like sun, moon, and stars will hold their fixed orbits. The laws of science will turn out to be useless. None will be able to explain this coming apart of the universe. Yet, such a collapse is sure to take place for St. Paul proclaims, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22).

 On that Day, the situation will not be a millennial reign of Christ or some Left Behind drama of a second chance. The end will be the end. To see the chaos as king and not Christ is the temptation. Nevertheless, the power and glory of God’s Son as Judge will be the center of attention. All will see that works never contributed to salvation. Let alone, no mere religion paves the way into God’s kingdom. The appearance of Jesus will be to all, but still divided. For some by faith He will be relief from the chaos, while others from unbelief would rather keep the chaos as their comfort. Yet, the end of the World is only ushering in the rightful king. For God says, “…my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.”

 So then, what shall we say to such waiting? We are longing to know the blessing Jesus brings! You see it in the fig tree lesson for it teaches us how God loves order. Summer comes only because there is a spring. Christ comes again only because He defeated sin, death, and the Devil. Not the fig tree, but the cross carries fruitfulness from the suffering and death of God’s Son. As there were signs pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus, so the same with His second coming. The times are ripe and have been that way since His resurrection. Wars, bad weather, tragedy, death, political strife, family problems are ordinary signs in a sinful world. However, like our garbage dumps, the load of sin and death is more than recycling, but compounding.

 Rather than the signs being a witness, they can turn into false worship. How many have fallen prey to a certain date drawing near? It has happened in generations past over special times, but even more today. It makes foolish the Christian confession and can lead people into despair of unbelief. Rather than dates, we know the blessings Christ brings. He does this by the signs of His service in the Word and sacrament. How close is He, so close He covers us by the waters of baptism, close enough to speak forgiveness, and even closes the gap by His true body and blood. Christ draws near, at the very gates to give faith in Him. He is not waiting for a time, but is already taking the time to care for sinners. The end only proves He does not pass away.

 So then, what shall we say to such waiting? We are living with work to do in the time we have. Since none knows when Christ returns, the focus turns in another direction that does matter to God. It is to admit we are not masters but servants given the right to work. This happens by the way God orders our lives. All have an entrustment of relationships and responsibilities such as a husband or wife, parent or child, pastor or people, employee or employer, and the list goes on. Waiting for a new heavens and a new earth, still means caring and holding to what is good at the present. A favorite line from Lord of the Rings is Gandalf saying to overwhelmed Froto, “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

 Living with work to do is different from having your best life now or thinking it will last. Jesus our master guarantees any work must be watchful of Him. This is for our good to live by faith alone, since in these latter days we have much to bear. False teaching keeps attacking both life in terms of the law and the life Jesus promises by the Gospel. Persecution threatens to silence the Christian confession driving the church out of the public square, schools, and finally the family. The delay of our Lord’s return even leaves weary hands and hearts. To watch is for us to live with hope at all times in the faithfulness of Christ. He is the master that will return more than for a home, but for the sake of His servants.

 So then, what shall we say to such waiting? Creation is not going to last so look to Christ in the chaos. The blessing of what Christ brings is near and His glory shall be revealed soon enough. Since every sign of the end assures us of Christ’s return, we as His servants work with a watchful eye. The end of the world is coming, but humanity is not calling the shots in how this happens. We are at the mercy of God at the end of a day, at the end of our life, and at the end of the world! Thankfully, Jesus gives a better answer than Hollywood that we can handle, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Amen. “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, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”