**Mark 13:24-37 November 25, 2018 (Last Sunday at St. John)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 13 here re-reading these words. “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 cock crows or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all; Stay awake.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When you come to the end, you have to say goodbye. So we gather together, to say goodbye to the Church Year, to say goodbye to November, to say goodbye to a season of the church, and to say goodbye to each other, as I leave to go be the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, in Onekama Michigan. And in every Sermon I’ve preached to you in my time here at St. John two things have never happened. I have never cried from this pulpit. I don’t intend to start now. I don’t mean to speak ill of him, but my field education pastor had a habit, almost in every sermon of crying and getting very emotional. I think that is why I have always felt that in my position as your pastor I am called to keep a calm demeaner and preach to You the Word of God. Which brings us to the second thing that has never happened from this pulpit, I have never set out to preach a sermon, about me. You don’t come here to hear about me. You aren’t members at this Church just because you want to know more about me, because you want to be like me, because you worship me, or anything else about me personally. This is not St. Jacob Lutheran Church, and so this sermon, even if it’s my last, will not be about me. It will not be a eulogy of all I’ve done here as your pastor. It won’t be a soapbox on which I take an opportunity to let you know what I’ve really thought about this Church throughout the last 5 years, don’t worry, there is not where the fire and brimstone speech comes in, just because I’m leaving. This is a sermon, like all the others, about our text for today and how Jesus Christ remains Your Savior.

Our epistle says it best, and should remain our focus in any time we meet together. “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.” To Him be the glory, to him be the focus. That will not change. No matter who stands in this pulpit, no matter what happens in the world. But as you come to the end you naturally think back on the beginning, on how it all started. The world began with God the Father speaking and God the Son, the very Word of God creating, while the Holy Spirit breathed life into creation. God made it all, and it was good. A Good creation, existing in perfection isn’t what we see at the end though, and the end of the Church year is a focus on the end of all things. We can’t dismiss the words that we hear, of destruction and scary images here in Mark 13, because they are said by our same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling form heaven, and the power in the heavens will be shaken.” This after last week we heard about other signs of Judgment Day, wars and rumors of wars, calamity and tragedy and destruction, families betraying each other, ironically this message being heard right before Thanksgiving, when we all come together to give thanks to God for each other, and the list goes on and on. Scary stuff. Frightening images. Yet they can’t be ignored.

The future is scary, and we are creatures of habit who don’t like change. This is true in many aspects of our lives, but especially in our lives as Christians. Well, the end brings change. This is the end. We won’t stay in the green, we will move to the blue. We won’t stay meeting here at 9:30 we will move to 8:30. A time of transition means a time of change, it’s what we all have to face in the months ahead. I won’t stand up here as your pastor, I’ll be gone. This is the end.

We don’t like change, and there is where the mirror of the Law reveals our sinful nature when it comes to a desire for things to remain the same. Jesus says about his coming on Judgment Day that we are to remain awake! We are to remain vigilant, like a doorkeeper throughout the night. That the end doesn’t mean a time of laziness, a time of complacency, but that we should be on guard to see the signs and recognize the return of Jesus our Savior. Look around, the end is coming not just for the Church Year but for this sinful creation. And I don’t have to stand on a street corner with a sign to get your attention, you should see the signs yourselves. Look at the Word, recognize that this world will come to an end. You can’t stay. You can’t hide in a cave, or under a mountain. Decay is in itself change, and the world is slowly dying, it will not last forever. We must repent of our love for this world, and it’s things, and it’s stuff, and instead look to that which will not decay, the lasting treasures of heaven that no rust can destroy, the good stuff! Righteousness, salvation, an everlasting life rather than a finite experience of small and expiring pleasure on a ship that is sinking, on a world that will be destroyed.

Stay awake! See the signs. Continue to serve where God has called you. Oh how we have failed at these simple commands. We’ve failed at all the commands of God, but here especially, how we feel the temptation to fall asleep. You get to the end of the race, your arms and legs are tired, you just want to sleep. I remember the fatigue of working night shifts at 7-11, going back home at the end of the shift and falling down in bed, feeling like I could sleep forever. At the end you don’t feel invigorated to stay awake and keep going. You want a time of peace, of rest, a time to set the work down and just be for a while.

Now isn’t that time, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. “Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 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.” I’m leaving, but that doesn’t mean the work is done or the work should be set aside. Because I’m not the one to be worried about! I’m not peeking into your windows at night, I’m not stalking your facebook feed, I’m not the one who will show back up in a few months to make sure everything is still going alright. But this church remains built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and it is He that we will have to give answer to, for the things that we have done wrong, written in the book that is read on the final day. You have always had to give answer not to me, not to any pastor specifically in all the years of St. John, but always to Christ.

The temptation is to sit back, and wait until a new pastor comes, and then we can start again, but that is a temptation of Satan himself. There is work to be done, work in the caring of souls, work in the care of faith, work in educating and learning more about God’s Word, and work to be done in the community to shine the light of Jesus Christ, through the unworthy instruments that we all are together as a church of sinners. Now is not the time to fall asleep. Jesus says, “Stay awake.”

I’ve quoted a lot of hymns in my time as your pastor. Maybe you found it annoying, maybe you thought it was just something I do because I like hymns. For me I quote hymns, because I try to make sense of the words that we may mindlessly sing, and help all of us realize that they are here to teach us, not just be pleasant and wonderful melodies. We just sang one of my favorite Lent hymns, “Lamb of God pure and holy” and in it, repeated 3 times are the words, “All sins Thou borest for us, else had despair reign o’er us. Have mercy on us! O Jesus.” Despair can be a sleep of sadness. We sleep because we’re tired, we sleep because we’re lazy, but we also can sleep and give up due to despair. Satan can keep us in our lowest moments to believe that we can’t do anything, that we are worthless, and that we should just give up.

I don’t share this very often, but in my education to be a pastor, on a Friday as a Fourth Year Seminarian, I failed my Theological Interview. And it was at this time that my wife and I were expecting our first child and things were just, off and we didn’t have a lot of definitive answers from our doctor and we were going in for an ultrasound that Monday but we were both nervous about it and in the next few weeks we would find out that we had lost our child to a miscarriage. And with the exception of when my mother died when I was 16, it was the lowest point in my life. I felt like I wasn’t going to make it, that I wanted to give up, that I was unfit to serve as a pastor. It was the very next day, on Saturday, that my wife and I interviewed with St. John Lutheran Church in Palmer, Kansas. I don’t remember much of the conversation, I remember going into it saying that we had agreed to it before all of this and that we were just going to as honest as we could about ourselves and our lives and afterwards thinking there is no way that Church will ever call me in a million years.

And on call night, I stood up and heard, “St. John Lutheran Church, Palmer, Kansas.” And it took a little while but then it clicked that you, were the church we had interviewed with. And it meant the most to me because it meant, that in one of my lowest moments, God through You, picked me and called me here.

We are called to stay awake, because even in our lowest moments, God loves us, and picks us up, dusts us off and tells us that we are His. We are not useless, Satan’s lies and guilt are dispelled in the person and work of Jesus Christ who died for you. Who rose for you and He can use any imperfect instrument to do His Will. That’s the final lasting message of the end of the Church year, that even in the calamity and tragedy of the end of the world The Son of Man comes, to send out the angels to gather the elect to himself. That your sin is destroyed, that you are forgiven, that the darkness is dispelled and you bathe in His light. No despair is too deep, no sadness is too great, no matter what, God loves you. God has saved you.

So we keep going. We stay awake, and we serve. God be with you as you continue to serve and be His children long after I have gone. And thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Thank you for your kindness and love. And instead of saying a lasting and final goodbye, let us simply say, that we will see each other again, either here on Earth or as brothers and sisters in Christ in heaven.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.