

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

29th November 2020 – First Sunday in Advent

MARK 13:32-37

WATCH AND WAIT IN HOPE

Are you ready? Well, are you? Can you even answer that question? I'm sure your answer is 'I don't know', because you have no idea what I am asking about, do you? And so I'm guessing that as I ask you that question and make that challenge to you, you probably have a few questions of your own pop straight into your head: Ready for what? When is it happening? How do I get ready?

There has been a whole lot of things we have learnt this year 2020, hasn't there? And one of the big ones for us all is to be ready and prepared for all kinds of scenarios because we don't know what will happen next. Back in March schools, churches, and businesses suddenly were closed to in person attendance, and we all had to be ready to adjust to going online. Borders have closed, opened, and closed again a number of times. Just last week we saw South Australia get a 12-hour warning about a hard lock down across the state. People there hadn't stocked up on enough toilet paper, or food I suppose, so they had to rush the shops to stock up on their supplies.

When it comes to being ready, the 'what' is undoubtedly important. Knowing the 'how' is vital to being able to be ready and prepared. But do we always need to know, or can we always need know, the 'when'? Consider a fire drill, Fawlty Towers style. (watch YouTube clip: *Fawlty Towers fire drill*)

As we begin the four weeks of Advent today, we remember that Advent is a time of waiting. Throughout these four Sundays we remember how God's people had been waiting for thousands of years for their Saviour, God's promised Messiah, to come. Now, as we 'wait' for Christmas, we remember that as Jesus came then He will come again also. And so, we have a number of reminders, like Jesus' words today in our reading from Mark 13, reminding us of the need to always be watching and waiting in hope.

Are you ready? The 'what'. Jesus coming again. There are numerous descriptions in the Bible of how this will happen, but a lot of them are quite figurative and so open for debate and discussion

among Christians about how it will all be. What do we know? That Jesus will come again. This time it will be in judgement, but that's about God's grace for Christians. We know that this time, unlike when He was born as a baby in a stable to lowly parents in a backwater town in an unimportant part of the world of that time, we know that this time there for both for believers and non-believers will be no doubt that God has come into the world. And we know also that when Jesus comes again it will be the fulfillment of God's kingdom coming in all of its glory, with all the promises of peace, hope, joy, no more suffering or tears, which are freely offered to all who have Jesus as their Saviour. We live in God's kingdom now, in a time of now but not yet; then we will be living in it completely.

And the 'how'. How do we get ready? We looked at this three weeks ago, so just to quickly recap; it's about staying close to God. Reading, studying, reflecting on the Bible. Worshipping together. Remembering the promises of our baptism and receiving Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion. Trying every day to live out our faith in how we worship and serve God and seek to serve others. Sharing our faith when and as we can. Things we are not perfect with, but things God calls us to do, and we try to do, to ensure we are close to Him and so we are ready for when Jesus comes, whether that is Him coming into this world again or our departure from this life on earth.

Are you ready? Was there another question we often ask in response to this? Oh yeah, the 'when'. How do we answer that? Have a look at what Jesus says in this reading here, which is similar to warnings to always be ready which both He and others give us in many other parts of the Bible. Do we know when this time will be? No. Jesus makes it very plain that not even He knows. Do we want to know? Yes. How much easier is it for us to be prepared and waiting for something when we know it is going to happen, like Basil Fawlty's guests were waiting for their fire drill.

As westerners in the 21st Century, time is important to us. As I say this some of you will now look to your watches or phones and being to calculate in your head when this address will finish, what time church will finish, when you have to leave for your next event, what time the things you have to do during the week are on and how you will organise your time around them. While some of these things will be a bit flexible with their timing, on the whole knowing when things are on and how long

they will go for is very important to how we organise our lives. If I don't know the 'when', how can I plan?

Do we then like it when Jesus and others in the Bible say we don't know when Jesus' second coming will be? No. It goes against our thinking. That is a big challenge and step out in our faith. Over the years many Christians (some churches focus on this more than others), some other religions and other sects have looked at what they believe are signs of the end coming in the Bible and tried to predict when Jesus will come again. Every so often we hear of these predictions being made. Every time they are turn out to be wrong. That shouldn't, and hopefully doesn't, surprise us, because Jesus says so plainly; we don't know when that time will be.

People who make those predictions about the end of the world are right about one thing; we are living in the end times right now. But that's not related to COVID, or a Trump presidency, or even war in the middle east. We have been in the end times for the last 2,000 years, ever since Jesus went back to heaven. So we are warned – watch and be alert!

When it comes to being ready, what does it mean for us that we don't know when it will happen? It means we always need to be ready. A good fire drill is one which people don't know is coming, not like the one at Fawlty Towers where everyone is already downstairs and waiting. If an organisation knows the boss is coming by to make an inspection at 10am on Tuesday what do they do? Make sure everything is perfect and ready for his or her arrival. That's why you get TV shows like Undercover Boss where the boss or their representative make surprise and undercover visits so they can really see how their company or organisation is working. If people know this could happen at any time, how will they react? They will always be on alert and doing what they are tasked to do.

We know Jesus is coming again, and as Christians most of us accept that we don't know when this will be. How do we respond? Are we ever like Basil Fawlty's guests who passively wait in the lobby, doing nothing, because they know the fire drill will start soon so they don't want to put in the effort to do anything else? Do we ever think ' Well, I know that I am saved (which we can be sure of), and I'm doing what I believe is my bit, so I don't really need to put myself out to do more / give more

/ forgive more / accept more / love more/ share more / help more / serve more?... add in whatever else you like here. The fact that we now watch and wait, as Jesus tells us to, in hope, means that we don't have to be afraid in any way of when this time will happen. When we have Jesus as our Saviour we will be saved. The hope here is an absolute certainty because of the forgiveness and new life God gives us because of Jesus.

The call to watch and wait, which Jesus gives us over and over here in our reading, is not a call to idly sit by waiting in the lobby, or to spend our time trying to work out when this time will be. The call to watch and wait, in hope, is a call to get up and walk the way of Jesus and the cross; living as those who are already a part of His kingdom, and doing what we can to help others to know about this also. Not doing this out of fear because He might come and find us 'napping', but doing it in love and thankfulness that we are already a part of this kingdom; doing it because we wait in the hope and the certainty of His love.

Are you ready? I pray that you can all strongly answer: Yes!

Advent: a time of watching and waiting for when Jesus comes again, at any time, but a time of also living now in the hope we have through the Saviour who has come and will come again. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

Ready and Waiting

- Do you have any thoughts or images about what it will be like when Jesus comes again? If you can, have a look and see what the Bible says about this.
- How do you feel about not knowing when this time will be? Is that a step out in faith for you, are you comfortable with it?
- Remember that it is God who makes you ready to enter His perfect kingdom. Consider how you now live and act as someone who has this promise in your life.

In Hope

For Christians 'hope' is not a wish, or a 'desire' or even a 'dream'. It is a certainty of what we both live in and are heading for because of the love God has for us.

- How does it affect your life knowing you live in this hope God gives? How might your life be different if you did not have this hope?
- A big part of our call as people who live in this hope is to take it out to others. How has God equipped you to share your faith? What situations for witness has He placed you in? If you struggle with this in any pray for His help and guidance.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
29.11.2020*