Mark 13:35-37 35Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. 36If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”

Yes, here we are at another beginning of the Church year, here we are at Advent! The word advent means “the coming” or “the manifesting.” It is a season in which we are to prepare. We are to prepare ourselves in two ways. First, we prepare for the celebration of Christmas, that season that heralds the first coming of Jesus, the Christ, the Savior of the world. Christmas is important to us only because of Easter. You do grasp that right? If you don’t have Easter and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, why would you care about some Jewish kid born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger? All the stuff of Christmas is only important because of Easter.

Second, advent is also about preparing for the Second coming of Jesus. He has promised that he will return. He will return in majesty and wonder. He will return with power and authority. He will return in quite a different way than He first came. Not humble and lowly but exalted and worshipped. In regard to the Second Advent of Jesus I like to think in terms of Philippians 2. Verses 9-11 tell us about it. They say, **“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** That passage reminds us that Jesus is everything. I don’t care who you are or where and when you lived, when Jesus returns you will stand before him and you will give him worship, glory, honor and praise! You might be doing that from the depths of eternal hell, but nevertheless, you will give worship and honor to Jesus!

By the way, don’t miss the intensity of the little phrase found in Philippians. The phrase that says, **“In heaven and on earth and under the earth.”** Heaven is the dwelling place of God. Earth is this world, and all who are in it. The phrase **“under the earth”** is one that points to the realm of Satan and his demonic host. Note that even though they hate Jesus with their entire being, they will bow to him and confess that He is indeed God and Lord over all, yes, even over them. Scripture makes it clear that this event will bring upon those in hell a greater severity of suffering that will never cease. Make no mistake about this, Jesus Christ is God and Lord and He will be, along with His Father and the Holy Spirit, worshipped and glorified as such!

Now I am simple. I hear about such things and my mind immediately says to me, “Hmm, I guess I had better pay attention to this Jesus fellow!” There it is! There is the whole point of our lives. The opportunity to pay attention to this Jesus fellow. You realize there are only two ways to deal with Jesus. Either you believe, trust and follow him or you don’t. It is unbelief which causes us to ignore and despise Jesus in our lives. We just don’t believe He is the Lord. One of the interesting things you do as a Pastor, is you think about and often have to deal with many levels of unbelief. What really causes me to chuckle are the many who live in unbelief, who live the way of the world, who do what is absolutely contrary to faith in Jesus, persistently, and then still claim they are “believers.”

If you paid attention, our Old Testament reading actually addresses that very truth. Here is what is said of believers: **“5You meet anyone who joyfully practices righteousness, who remembers you by walking in your ways!”** Yep, that is the believer. We strive after Godliness. We do so because of the wonder and promises of God found in the Savior. We are righteous not because we have perfectly obeyed, but are righteous because we have believed in the Savior who changes our very heart and attitude to His way. The believer may sin but the believer does not pursue and persist in sin, we **“walk in God’s ways.”**

Concerning the unbeliever are these words: **“But you were angry because we sinned. We have remained in our sins for a long time. Can we still be saved? 6All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. 7There is no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. So you hid your face from us. You made us melt by the power of our guilt.”** Study those words carefully, yes, they reveal the depth of our sinful nature, of an attitude that despises the Lord. Notice that one of the first signs that you have a problem with God and Jesus is that you stop calling on his name! Yep, skipping church is one of the first signs of unbelief. Let that sink in.

So all of this, this issue of faith and unbelief, makes this text a rather important one. Our theme will be: **KEEP WATCH!**

Now I am sure you understand that in order to speak of this second coming of Jesus we need to make sure we have the point of his first coming down! God sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. Christmas will soon be upon us. Christmas is about how that Savior came into our world. He came lowly and humble. Came to fulfill all of God’s Law for us. He came, even at his conception and birth, fulfilling God’s Word. Eventually Jesus would reveal himself as God’s Son and then go about doing exactly what He came for. He became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In fulfillment of the promises of God, Jesus went to the cross, suffered our damnation and death and was buried. On the third day, in accordance with God’s Word, He rose from the dead and proved absolutely that He is our God and Lord who offers us an immense gift. He offers us life and salvation because by grace through faith He offers us the forgiveness of sins and with that forgiveness of sins, the wonder and promise of eternal life forever. That’s what Jesus has done.

Jesus calls upon us to believe in Him. What are we to believe? He is God’s Son. He is our Savior. He is our God and Lord. We hear His Word. We strive to live holy lives in accord with his word. By the way, the issue with Jesus is not that we live perfect lives, we can’t. We are literally sinners through and through. No, the issue of Jesus is not that we sin but rather that we are repentant sinners. We are filled with sorrow. Our desire is to walk with Jesus. We are moved by God’s Holy Spirit to be new creatures, creatures of repentance. We put no confidence in the flesh but rather in the wonders of Jesus. Or attitude is the glory and honor of Jesus!

But, I get ahead of myself. If we believe in Jesus then we recognize that the words before us are the words of Jesus and it seems they are rather important words! First thing to note: **“Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.”** I assume that like me, you see the urgency of those words? What are the words found in Scripture that we use in our funeral services, normally at the grave side. They say: *“May we, then, with a deep sense of our sinfulness humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, before whom we are dust, and honestly ponder the rapid flight of our days. "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure (Job 14:1-2)." We cannot but say with David: "You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath (Ps. 39:5)."* Maybe you know when you will die and when you will face the Lord, but I don’t. I don’t have a clue. It’s true, I work to be healthy that I live as long as I can, but I consider that a part of my being a steward of God. What I do know is that I can’t even guarantee that I will be here tonight, let alone tomorrow. I get the urgency of these words.

I like how Jesus gives us the little parable to help us think this through. The parable is easy. The man is Jesus. The journey is the period from his ascension to his return. He left things in our charge! Here is a line perhaps you had better think about: **“He put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. Therefore keep watch.”**

I fear we don’t grasp the power and importance of those words. If you are a servant of the Lord, one of his children, a believer that He is God and Lord, then you have a job to do. It is true, we have to survive in this world, but making this world and its stuff the most important is a problem. You have been assigned a task. Maybe your task is just that you sing loud at church. Maybe your task is to be a leader and helper in the church. Maybe your task is just to make sure that your family is raised in the nurture and truth of the Lord. Maybe your task is to just be a quiet Christian who serves the Lord with your presence in church, your offerings, your smile and confident spirit in Christ! I don’t know what your task is. What I do know is that each of us is to serve the Lord.

You do not serve the Lord by ignoring Him. You do not serve the Lord by persisting in sin. You do not serve the Lord being worldly. You do not serve the Lord by skipping the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. I could go on and on in this way. Let’s sum this up this way: “Is your attitude one of service to the Lord or is your attitude that of the world that doesn’t have time or even consideration for the Lord?” You have a task! In our text, the example of the task of the door keeper is given. A door keeper is to keep watch! Well, if you aren’t doing that then you have a problem. If you aren’t serving the Lord, you have a problem! Now you see why this section has this pointed command: **Therefore keep watch!** While this is especially applied to the doorkeeper whose job it is to watch this also has a general application to everyone. If you task is to sing, then sing. If your task is to be supportive and helpful to you Church, then support. You have a job and you are to be about your job!

I am going to guess you are getting the gist of this text. Again, remember this is Jesus speaking and directing you. Here is another phrase that I think we need to pay attention to. Verse 36, **“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.”** We think that is referring to actual sleep but it goes a lot deeper than that. Consider the following passages: Psalm 13:3 **“Give light to my eyes so I do not sleep in death.”** Or consider the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6. **“But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, but you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then, let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober.”** As in these passages, I think Jesus has used the word sleep to refer to unbelief. It makes sense to me. We are ready and alert, we are watching and ready because of faith and trust in Jesus. But unbelief keeps us from our calling. We are called to be servants of the Lord, to be his children and heirs of eternal life. If we are doorkeepers, then sleeping on the job is considered a major, terrible violation. I do know in the past that for soldiers, sleeping on duty was a major offense because you put the whole camp in danger. Well, the same goes here. You sleeping on the job, abandoning your task, not serving the Lord is a pretty serious offense. Now go back and consider more deeply the words that say: **“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.”**

So where does that put all of us? To the last words of Jesus here. He says, to encourage: **“What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!** There is no doubt in my mind what Jesus is telling us. The meaning of keeping watch here is captured by others and given to us in different words through the work of the Holy Spirit who gave us the whole Bible. Here are some of those passages with the same message of our text:

Philippians 2:12 **“Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** Or how about 3:14, **“I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

1 Timothy 1:18 **“I am entrusting this instruction to you…so that by them you may fight the good fight, with faith and a good conscience.”** We see the same phrase in 6:11-12, **“But you, O man of God, flee from these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith.”**

How about 1 Corinthians. First 9:24, **“Do you not know that when runners compete in the stadium, they all run, but only one receives the prize? Run like that—to win.”** Or 10:12, **“So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall.”**

What I want to impress on you is that Scripture is filled with such passages. Passages telling you in different ways to “Keep watch.” We keep watch by keeping Jesus before us. We keep watch by serving Him and his Word. We keep watch as we keep the gospel in Word and sacrament in our lives. We keep watch by our worship and praise of the Lord together. We keep watch by keeping Jesus foremost in our hearts and minds.

May these words be true for you! Keep watch! Amen.