

Introductory

The primary reading for this Sunday is given as Mark 11: 1-10, the Triumphal Entry. This text, from Mark 13, is rendered the alternative reading, and it is the one with which we will be dealing. There are parallel texts in Matthew (24: 29-35) and Luke (21:25-33). They are very similar to this reading, but they also contain some noteworthy differences.

In LW series A, Matthew 24: 37-44 is appointed for Advent 1A. The Triumphal Entry is an alternative reading. LSB does the same but adds v. 36 in the first reading. On Advent 1B, the readings are the same as in LSB. For Advent 1C in LW, the reading is from Luke 21: 25-36, with the Entry an alternative, and the same readings are appointed in LSB.

In TLH, the Triumphal Entry is the text appointed to be read on Advent 1, which I find to be interesting. It looks to me like the TLH lectionary doesn't address the Second Coming nearly as often as LW or LSB. TLH came out in 1941, before the Nation of Israel was established in 1948. Before that, Christians talked a lot less about the Second Coming.

I'm not among those who decide the texts for the lectionary, but they are compelling me to talk about the End Times a lot, and especially this time of the year. That's probably a good thing, because since 1948 the Christians have been talking about that a lot, and a lot of them think Israel has a role to play in the ending events. Of course, they do not.

Since this is the First Sunday in Advent, the beginning of a new church year, it may be well to mention that and perhaps to give a word of explanation. So also begins the annual struggle to stick to the church year while the World is well into its observance of "The Holiday Season." It may be a losing battle, but that doesn't mean that we don't fight it.

The underlying subject matter for all of the thirteenth chapter of Mark is The Church Militant and Triumphant. This sermon is prompted by the question at the beginning of the chapter about the timing of The Apocalypse. As Jesus and His disciples are leaving the Temple, they observe and point out the magnificence and the beauty of the complex.

The response of Jesus is to tell them that the buildings will be destroyed, and that the destruction will be so complete that "there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (RSV), His description of Rome's pummeling of Jerusalem in 70 A.D (Anno Domine – Year of Our Lord). Others describe it so as well.

That was the beginning of “tribulation,” and that tribulation continues to this day. This is an important point because a lot of the people who talk about the End Times get it wrong, and a lot of our people hear them. Note for your hearers that when Jesus talks about “after that” destruction, it doesn’t say how long after that destruction. More on that later.

The group then journeyed east, across the Brook Kidron, to the Mount of Olives, a place to which they often went to get away from the city, often to pray. The pair of brothers, their interest piqued by the talk of the end of the Temple, ask Him when this will happen, followed by an inquiry as to how they would know – what signs – that the time is near.

Jesus tells them firstly to “take heed” or “beware” because many will try to lead them astray on this issue of the End Times and the signs of its coming. He then goes on to speak of some specific “signs” that will be observed, things that have always been there, at least since the fall into sin, and that always will be there short of paradise.

He speaks then of the “desolating sacrilege” and the flight from Jerusalem. The Temple was included in the Roman sack of Jerusalem, and they slaughtered all those who had gone there for sanctuary, then destroyed the lot of it. Those who could fled Jerusalem, many Jews for Masada, where they died, many Christians to Pella, where they lived.

Textual Notes

24. In the material immediately before this, Jesus has been talking about the tribulations that will beset Christians. He is about to talk to them about their deliverance from that tribulation, “Ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν – but in those days, after that tribulation;” at some time after the things just described, but it doesn’t say how long after.

The first word is “Ἀλλά, and it is translated “but.” There are several ways to say “but” in the Greek language, and this way of saying “but” is to emphasize contrast between what has just been said and what is about to be said. The contrast is between normal things predicted to happen previous to this and abnormal things predicted to come “after that.”

He uses what appears to be Hebrew parallelism to talk about the darkening of both the sun and the moon. Those things are not normal; the Sun has shined from the beginning, and so has the moon. When the Sun and moon stop shining, along with the abnormal things about to be articulated, then we will know that the Second Coming has come.

The more modern commentaries struggle with what to make of this verse, since Mark’s words seem to speak to immediacy, and Matthew’s parallel adds “Εὐθέως – immediately” to “δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν – after the tribulation.” and yet we have no record of such darkening having happening in the First Century, because it didn’t, and it hasn’t.

At least two of the older English clergypersons take a different tack; both almost matter-of-factly take those words to be figurative. It is noteworthy that both of these men lived

and worked in days long before Millennialism so infused itself into Christian Theology. In his 1818 Commentary on the Bible, Joseph Benson writes how Jesus

proceeds now to describe the dissolution of the Jewish polity, and the abolition of the Mosiac economy, in all the pomp of language and imagery made use of by the ancient prophets, when they foretold the overthrow of cities and states. The expressions are highly figurative, and signify the passing away of all the glory, excellence, and prosperity of the nation: and the introduction of universal sadness, misery, and confusion; that the Jewish polity, both civil and religious, should be destroyed; that the Jews should be no more a people, united under a form of government administered by themselves, and possessing their own country.

Matthew Poole, another Englishman, wrote *English Annotations on the Holy Bible* (1683). In his notes on this verse, he notes that OT passages like Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7, and Joel 2:31 use this kind of language in a figurative way for the same things as Benson says. In retrospect, it remains to be seen if and how figurative is the language.

They all seem to think that these things have already happened, but they haven't. The key to misunderstanding these predictions is to misunderstand "after that." If I tell you that the Model T Ford will be manufactured, then after that the Model A, then after that the Mustang, then after that the Mustang Mach E SUV, how long is "after that?"

If I say that the Christian Church will be one at first, and then after that it will be two, and then after that there will be thousands of different brands of Christianity, most of them in one country that will be discovered, organized, and settled "after that," how long is "after that?" How long is "after that" here? At least 2000 years, and counting, that's how long.

25. Isaiah (14:12-14) indeed uses similar language while mocking the fall of Babylon, the description of the fall of Lucifer from heaven, and (34:4) when speaking of God's judgment on the nations. John does too when describing what will happen at the opening of the Sixth Seal (Revelation 6:13), and (9:1) at the sounding of the Fifth Trumpet.

The gist of this apocalyptic preaching is that Satan may be tormenting you now, but the time will come when your tormentor will be turned into the tormented, and you will be freed from the tribulation caused by him. Such is a common theme in NT and EC literature, most notably in that Revelation of John, a book of comfort for Christians.

26. Those things will happen, it says "καὶ τότε ὄψονται τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον – and then they will see the Son of Man coming." The adverb "τότε – then" means it will come next, and that's all it means. How long between the darkening and the visual sighting of Jesus? Probably not too long, but let's see how this thing plays out.

When I was a kid, we would often go and visit grandma, which was just okay for a kid, and often we would go shopping or something fun afterwards. My mother would tell us

that we're going to see grandma, and "then" we're going to the fun thing. In our minds, the "then" meant after a short stay at grandma's house, but that's not what it meant.

The verb "to see" is the physical perception of physical sight, and "coming" is a present participle, and Jesus tells us that the coming will be "ἐν νεφέλαις μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς καὶ δόξης. – in the clouds with great power and glory." The noun modified by the first preposition of location is in the dative case; Jesus will be beside the clouds.

The noun(s) modified by the second preposition of motion are in the genitive case and have Him going with "power and glory," leaving heaven accompanied by those two things, both of them called "great." The OT got a lot of "power and glory" from God, and in the NT we see glimpses. In the future, we will see it in its fulness – almost?

27. After that "καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους – and He will then send out the angels to gather up "τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ – His elect," i.e. "Christians." They will gather "ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων – from the four winds," an idiom meaning all the earth, and "ἀπ' ἄκρου γῆς ἕως ἄκρου οὐρανοῦ – from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

The noun "ἄκρου – ends" occurs six times in the NT, twice each here and in Matthew's parallel account. One is in reference to the tip of the finger of Lazarus, (Luke 16:24), the one the Rich Man wanted him to dip into water and bring it to his tongue so he could have relief in hell. The other is a reference to the tip of Jacob's staff (Hebrews 11:21).

28. I think I'm going to get a fig tree. I did not know that you could grow figs around here, but the Internet says that you can, and I shall. They are not common around here, but in that Palestine you couldn't swing a dead cat without hitting a fig tree, the third tree mentioned in the OT, which leaves are used to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve.

The fig tree was also very common in other parts of the Ancient World, and it symbolized things, particularly peace and prosperity. But that's not why Jesus chose to talk about the fig tree in this "παραβολὴν – parable." He chose it because of its commonality, using an object already present, not brought from home, to teach theology.

If I were using this parable to teach theology, I would talk about an apple tree, with which most around here are familiar. Under no circumstances would I bring an object from home for the "object lesson." I won't because Jesus doesn't, and I won't because objects do not help the youngsters understand, but they serve to rather confuse them.

He points out that when "ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς ἀπαλὸς γένηται – the branch births a soft, tender branch" and "ἐκφύη τὰ φύλλα – it causes the leaves to sprout," then "γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν – you know that heat (summer) is near." I would like to say that even the most dendrology-deficient ought to get that, but sadly, such is not the case.

Even in the hinterlands of eastern Iowa there are townies, so I will explain how fruit trees work, and it isn't complicated. The point of comparison is that in the cold of winter,

fruits trees go to sleep, but when it starts to warm up, when Spring is upon us and you see the first signs of new life, and you know Summer is only a stone's throw away.

29. He tells His hearers that when they see “ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ θύραις – these things becoming, know that it is near, right next to the door.” The “things” to which He refers include most of what He has talked about in this chapter, the first “things” that are normal, and then after that the “things” that are not normal.

30. He references the passing of a generation; ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη μέχρις οὗ ταῦτα πάντα γένηται – truly, I say to you that this generation will never pass until all of these things come to pass.” We have spoken before of the meaning of “ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη – this generation,” and how it can and does mean different things in the NT.

Sometimes it means a group of people who were born at about the same time, like we generally use it. Sometimes it means a type of people. Sometimes it seems to mean both. Here, the meaning may have unclear then, but now it is not. Clearly, He did not mean that the darkening would take place before the current chronological generation died.

In my studies of the Bible and observing humanity, I have concluded that when it comes right down to it, people are people, and the “wicked and evil” type of people Jesus rails against are with us to this day. The caution offered here is to not think there will ever be a time on this earth when you will be free from that generation – those kinds of people.

31. Does the Speaker now anticipates doubt or skepticism on the part of the hearer, because the things of which He speaks are not ordinary in nature, stating that heaven and earth – this all will be gone, “παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ [μὴ] παρελεύσονται – but my Word will never pass away,” – the means of creation (the Word) remains.

(Some the manuscripts include only one, and some add the double negative, making the idea that the Word will always remain even more certain.)

32. You used to have to go into the Christian bookstore to see the wacked ideas on the Second Coming. Now it's a lot easier; you can view those wacked ideas on the Internet. But you will also find a lot of people on the Internet who can read the clear words of Jesus, and who believe that nobody can or does know the exact date, like it says here.

Speaking of the Second Coming, Jesus asserts in very clear and simple terms that “οὐδεὶς οἶδεν – nobody knows.” And if that isn't sufficiently simple and clear, He adds “οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ὁ Υἱός – not the angels in heaven nor the Son” the Second Person of the Trinity, and then an exception clause; “εἰ μὴ ὁ Πατήρ – except the Father.”

An exception clause is just that; there is one exception to the collective ignorance on this matter; only the Father knows. If you want to go with the anthropomorphism, you can talk about how the father tells the children that we're going on a trip, and he describes the trip, but he doesn't tell them when. The father knows, but none of the children know.

33. The point of all of this is not some childish “I know something you don’t know,” like when we were kids. The point is that the Christian should be ready at all times for this event. I don’t know if you’re into the “prepper” movement – that’s “Survivalism” at Wikipedia – or not, but those people are into being prepared for an apocalyptic event.

They even had a show, called *Doomsday Preppers*, on the Nat Geo Channel, now on DVD and online. If you’ve watched the show, then you know Preppers share in common the idea that something really bad is going to happen, and you don’t know when, but they all differ in what that really bad thing will be, but what Jesus talks about will be worse.

For some people. Because of the severity of things, and because you want to be ready for them, He urges Christians to “Βλέπετε, ἀγρυπνεῖτε· οὐκ οἴδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ καιρὸς ἐστίν – see, stay awake, you don’t know when this time is,” and it’s not the first time that Jesus has exhorted us to stay awake, and it will be a common theme in the coming Epistles.

The first verb invites us to look around and observe, like we would observe the buds on a tree in the spring, and to be aware of what is to come. The word for “time – καιρὸς” is not “χρονος,” the more general word for time. The word used here is often translated “age” or “epoch,” and often used in apocalyptic preaching; about the end of all things.

34. Another mini-parable;; the Second Coming is “ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἀπόδημος – like a travelling man.” The adjective is a hapax in the NT, a compound of “from – ἀπό” and “δημος – people bound by a similar culture” – the same root as “democracy.” It means that the man is going away from His own people – His comfort zone – to other cultures.

The man is Jesus, and He is in Jerusalem, and He knows where this thing is going; that it’s going to end with him not on earth, but in heaven. Heaven is a very different place (culture) from earth. After a certain time or age in heaven “seated at the right hand” of the Father, “He will come again in glory” leaving heaven and coming back to this earth.

The man left His house, “δοὺς τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐξουσίαν – having given to His servants the authority,” each to do “τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ - His work.” Included in these workers left in charge during the absence of the journeying owner is the one called “θυρωρὸς – door guard,” who is in charge of whom may or may not enter into His house.

The word “θυρωρὸς – door guard,” occurs only four times in the NT: once (John 10:3) when Jesus is talking about the guy who sprawls Himself across the opening of the sheep pen, and twice (John 18:16, 17) when He’s talking about an actual door. Do you let just anybody into your home? It’s why you keep it locked and use the dead bolt at night.

Me, I’m pretty particular about whom I allow access to my home and family, and not many are let in. Family, friends, and perhaps an acquaintance or two. If a stranger shows up on my front doorstep, I’m going to step out and close the door behind me, putting me and the door between them and my house. This is especially important if they are JWs.

Sounding like Ezekiel's watchman, the door guard – Pastor – of all people has to to “γρηγορή - stay awake.” His job is not only to allow access to some and to deny it to others, but he also has to watch for approaching danger of all kinds, and to warn the house of that danger. You have to see danger coming to be able to warn the household.

If you can't see danger approaching, and it's hard to see anything approaching when your eyes are closed, then you have to stay awake. The Pastor is the practical application for the watchman, like Ezekiel was the practical application in his day. I can't speak for anybody else, but I weary of warning all the time, but it doesn't mean I'm going to stop. .

35. The upshot, “γρηγορεῖτε οὖν – therefore stay awake.” Pastors ought not to fear the usual things that we fear, approaching danger to the flock in the form of Satan, the World, and the Flesh. These things have all been defeated, and in the end, they cannot harm us, and so neither they nor others are to be feared by the Shepherd or by the Flock.

To be a false shepherd is one thing, and we see plenty of that, and it's condemned in the Bible, but not here. What is condemned here is that Jesus, upon coming again, will find us negligent, lazy, or sleeping on the job. This is a cautionary tale for Pastors who don't understand how important our work is, and who maybe phone in too much of our duties.

36. And the point of it all is that “μὴ ἐλθὼν ἐξαίφνης εὖρη ὑμᾶς καθεύδοντας – not coming unexpectedly, He should find you sleeping.” Given what He has just said, there should be no time when His coming should be “ἐξαίφνης – unexpected.” Clearly, we ought to expect the Second Coming at any time, and we should be ready at all times.

People want to know how to do that, and I've been talking about food prep. You prepare food, and when it has been prepared, it's ready to eat. You prepare for This Day, so that when it comes, you are ready. How do you prepare, so that you're ready? Firstly, become a Christian, and secondly – this one is for most of our hearers – stay a Christian.

The parable speaks (34) to all Christians when it talks about each of us doing “his work,” and that's what we do while we're waiting. Christianity is not about sitting idly by waiting for the end to come – though that has been tried. It's about serving God and your fellow man in whatever vocation you are in, and most of your hearers have several.

There's a man known locally as Mr. Turkey. Every Thanksgiving, he feeds people a turkey dinner at the mall. It started small, and has become larger, and he makes it into the local paper every November as if it's news or something. That's one way to serve your fellow man. I don't know if he has his reward or not, but he's on the local TV news.

The man and woman who wait until they're married to live together, who have children, who feed and cloth those children, who take them to church every Sunday, who are responsible citizens, those people don't make the news. But what they do in those vocations is the heartbeat of a Christian society that serves God and our fellow man.

37. He concludes this sermon with a command to His hearers, “ὁ δὲ ὑμῖν λέγω, πᾶσιν λέγω, γρηγορεῖτε – what I say to you, I say to all, ‘stay awake!’” They have obeyed that command, and they wrote it down so that we might hear this same exhortation. Not only do Pastors have to stay awake. So do their flock have to stay awake, so that you’re ready.

Law/Gospel

Church Militant/Church Triumphant – We continue our dwelling in the Church Militant, and it is a life that is fraught with many difficulties, even for the people to whom we minister. We are not being persecuted, but we still do daily battle with Sin, Death, and Satan, as we await our arrival in the Church Triumphant. For some, that will come at death, and for others it will come at the Second Coming.

Fear/No Fear – There are many things to fear from the devil, the world, and our flesh. But we ought not to fear those things, but rather we ought to fear God, in Whose hands is our fate. But since He has shown Himself to be a loving and merciful God, we have no need even to fear Him.

Uncertainty/Certainty – Donald Rumsfeld famously said “There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know.” We don't know when, but we do know what.

Sermon Titles

Look! Up in the Sky!

Learn from the Fig Tree

Man on a Journey

What's a Doorkeeper?

Hymns

Sing Advent Hymns during the Advent Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark). Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*.. The Westminster Press, 1975

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MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

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BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

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Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html