

"Anticipation"
Mark 13:24-37
November 27, 2005
1st Sunday of Advent, Year B
the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Mark 13:24-37

²⁴"But in those days, after that suffering,

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.

²⁶Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷Then 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 forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Prayer.

Anticipation.

It is more common
than the oxygen we breath.

Before we knew language
we knew anticipation.
Before the beginning
of our first memories
we knew anticipation.
Before we took our first breath
we lived in our mother's womb
in a building state of anticipation.
This is not all there is.
There is something more.

Something far more wondrous
lying just beyond our fetal imagination.

Just as anticipation
is realized
a new spark is kindled.
With that first gasping breath
taken while cradled in the midwife's hand
a spark of creative anticipation
kindles a longing desire
for that which is
yet to come.

"Oh, he will be tall like his father,"
our mother cooed.
"She is beautiful, and with those lungs,

she will sing like an angel,”
our father observes.

Anticipation-
waiting
watching
realizing
the fulfillment of dreams.
All those “firsts” that are realized:
first words
“Did you hear him say 'Da-da'?”
first steps
“Would you take a look at her now?”
the first self-initiated, successful trip to the
bathroom
“What a big girl you are!”
- They are all the fulfillment
of anticipation
that so defines our human development
the cloak of identity
that is wrapped tightly around
the ego.

Just as anticipation
is realized
a new spark is kindled.

Thirteen years of public investment
comes to climax
with the shaking of hands with the
chairperson of the Board of Education
a mortarboard
and a sheepskin mounted and ready to be
framed.
“What are you going to do with your life,”
an uncle asks as he helps himself
to another heaping helping of cocktail
wieners.
“I never had the chance to go to college”
an aunt reflects quietly
deep in thought.
“Serve your country, see the world, settle
down
and become a law abiding, tax paying
citizen,”
our state and federal bureaucrats plan
budget, and analyze.

We learn that it is impossible
to separate anticipation from love.
Our heart skips a beat
beads of perspiration
wet the brow
and the anticipation of courtship
comes to fruition with a walk
down the aisle.

Just as anticipation
is realized
a new spark is kindled.
Employment and children
advancement and 401ks
new cars, houses and seasons
call forth a longing desire to
find something more
something more
than
the shallow
temporary fix of money and things.

Then
out of the blue
tragedy strikes
a member of our peers.
“I tried to wake him.
He was sleeping on the sofa,
or so I thought.
But he was already cold.”
A victim of high cholesterol
high blood pressure
and the genes of a bad heart.
“He looks good” everyone remarks
but deep inside your brain
you think to yourself
“No he doesn't. He looks dead!”

Like glacial water
splashed in the face
the thoughtful
the insightful
sets out on a new journey
a new quest
to find meaning and purpose
to explore mortality and eternity.

With renewed vigor
anticipation
of the ultimate concern
brings one to the living water
of Christ's Gospel,
renewal and restoration
at the altar
of Christ's atoning bread
and resurrected body.

Just as anticipation
is realized
a new spark is kindled.
"Retirement isn't all it is cracked up to be,"
many will remark.
"Why do you think so many
work until they die?"
Could it be because we must
work
to make ends meet?
In the absence of purpose
death quickly calls
and those who live long
come to know the drone
of muzak that fills
every doctor's waiting room.

"What will death be like" we wonder?
Will it be long and slow
or quick and painless?
What will heaven be like?" we hope.
Will it be reunion,
praise,
or just endless, empty space?
"Anticipation
Is making me late
Is keeping me waiting"¹
the lyrics rerun in our head.

And then
with a preacher's inflection
with the Gospel's clarity
we realize ...
... we realize
that all of life,
from our cradle to our grave,

1 Carly Simon, from the lyrics "Anticipation"

we have been preparing
for Advent.

Anticipation's
lifelong experience
has been building
towards one single event:
The cosmos will
shake and convulse.
The Son of Man
is coming in the clouds
at a time when we can not predict.
The Son of Man is coming
and the only thing we can do
in preparation is
to watch
to wait
and to keep awake.

All of life
is preparing us
for this moment
this glorious occasion
that soon will be fulfilled
when
anticipation will be realized
when
a baby will be born
a Savior will return
and God's kingdom
will come
to completion.

Glory to God in the Highest! Amen.