**Sermon – Mark 13:24-37 – 3/12/23**

Sermon Videolink: <https://youtu.be/M04QyRH1CnI>

About forty years ago I knew of a couple who were in love. They were going to get married, but the husband-to-be was doing a PhD in physics and before the wedding, he was offered a chance to do research in Antarctica for twelve months. This was before satellite communications had been established with Antarctic bases. The only way to communicate was by teleprinters, facsimile or booking a radiotelephone call that often didn’t work and anyone with a receiver could overhear your conversation.

The couple were well aware of the stress of a separation where any communication was going to be very difficult. They decided to postpone the wedding and treat the year apart as a test of their love for each other.

Separation from people you love can be difficult and not all relationships survive long separations.

Today we hear Jesus speaking to four of his close disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew. These men are like brothers to Jesus, and they love him. They have been with him for several years. Within a day or two he will be arrested and crucified. He will die and even though he will be raised he will no longer be with them the same way he has been. He will ascend to heaven to be with his Father. The disciples would be separated from the person they had grown to love, and it would be for a long time. This was going to be difficult for them. It was going to be a very big test of their love for Jesus.

To make matters worse, not only would they be separated from Jesus, but the world would continue to groan and suffer under the consequences of sin. The temple in Jerusalem, that great building that reminded them of God’s presence among them and his love for them, would be destroyed, with not one stone left on another. Many of their country folk would be forced to flee from Judea or be killed. They would constantly hear of wars and rumours of wars. The disciples would be arrested and flogged for their faith in Christ. Some will be betrayed by their own families.

When these bad things happen, they may begin to doubt God is in control, they may begin to doubt God cares about them. They may begin to doubt Jesus will return. Jesus tells his disciples what will happen so that they happen they will remember that they are signs and reminders that Jesus will return. He will return because he does not want the suffering to go on, he wants to bring peace and justice into the world. Jesus wants to restore the world, restore humanity, and gather all those to look to him for help together into a new world defined by peace, love, and justice.

This message is also for us here in 2023. We too live in a broken world where bad things continue to happen. We constantly hear about wars and rumours of wars. There are currently 110 active conflicts in the world, far too many for most of us to keep track of. People constantly still hurt one another, and far too often the violence is domestic. People are still persecuted for their faith including hundreds of millions of Christians. Our whole planet is groaning because of human sinfulness and greed.

Jesus is not physically present with us as a walking talking human. As we see the drama of human sin played out before us, often touching our own lives, we may be tempted to wonder about God. Does God love us, does God care, is God with us and will Jesus ever return to bring peace, justice, and joy to the whole of creation?

Today Jesus is talking to us as well. Reminding us that when bad things happen, they are signs that the world is broken and Jesus will return to renew all of creation. A broken unjust world is not God’s final plan. That is why Jesus came in the first place. When Jesus came into this world, he gave us a glimpse of his plans for all people and all of creation. He healed people, forgave people, accepted people, loved people and restored people. He has plans to recreate the world and make it into a place where love reigns supreme, where justice, peace, and joy seep into every corner of creation.

Jesus has plans to make all things new and he was prepared to die to make those plans into reality. When Jesus was raised back to life, God the Father and the Holy Spirit confirmed this plan. It is a divine plan and our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will make all things new.

We are reminded of this plan every time two or three of us gather in his name in worship and Jesus is there among us. We are reminded of his plan every time God gathers another person into Christ’s body with the promise of forgiveness, new life, and salvation. Once again God confirmed this plan this morning when he adopted Henry. We are reminded of our Lord’s plan every time we hear him speaking to us through the reading of scripture and preaching of his word. We are reminded of his eternal plan every time we join together with the saints of all time, gathered around the Lord’s table, feasting on the body and blood of Christ.

Jesus will return. We are surrounded by the signs of a broken creation reminding us constantly that Jesus will return. We don’t know when it will happen. Nobody except God that Father knows. Don’t be fooled by anyone who claims to know. At the same time keep watch because Jesus could return any time.

What happened to the young couple? The husband-to-be returned from Antarctica, and it was a joyful occasion because their love survived the separation and soon afterwards, they were married.

When Jesus returns there is nothing to be afraid of, his return will be a joyous occasion for those of us who love him. His return will be a moment of celebration because he will gather those who are waiting for him and invite us to the great eternal banquet in heaven. A celebration like no other.

In the meantime, Jesus says to you all, “Watch!”

Amen

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz