



“Change is Coming”

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Scripture (CEB):

Mark 13:32-37

³² “But nobody knows when that day or hour will come, not the angels in heaven and not the Son. Only the Father knows. ³³ Watch out! Stay alert! You don’t know when the time is coming. ³⁴ It is as if someone took a trip, left the household behind, and put the servants in charge, giving each one a job to do, and told the doorkeeper to stay alert. ³⁵ Therefore, stay alert! You don’t know when the head of the household will come, whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows in the early morning or at daybreak. ³⁶ Don’t let him show up when you weren’t expecting and find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to all: Stay alert!”

Sermon:

Change is hard.

And there are so many terrible changes happening in our country, around the world...sometimes it feels as if we are in the midst of seismic change, earth-shaking change, world-altering change...and not all of them are good.

Not by a long stretch!

- If you had heroes among those who have fallen from their pedestals in these last weeks, then that is a wrenching change.

- If you have finally spoken up through the “#metoo” campaign, or are speaking up about harassment at work or in your career or dating or in your home...then there is enormous change in your life.
- If you have been looking at changes in health insurance...there is expensive change coming.
- If you are dreading the Republican tax bill, there will be devastating change ahead for our economy.

And what if you have had to face a death of someone beloved: such sorrow and change?

What if, like me, many of you were caught off guard by the situation with Pastor Jan, and are grieving the loss of that relationship? That change is hard, too.

We will be discussing our budget after this worship service. There is a big deficit again this year. There have been deficits in the budget since before I came to Westminster and what this is doing to our savings is clear. The uncertainty of the future is unsettling. Yet more change.

Sometimes we can't help but wonder what we could have done differently, what we should have been out looking for, did we miss the signs of the changes swooping down on us, personally or nationally or in our church community?

Were we asleep?

Should we have been more alert? Did we miss something?

The new church year begins with such a provoking gospel lesson! Late in the gospel of Mark, the author warns the early Christians not to be caught off their guard, not to while away their days until the Lord comes.

Be alert, he admonishes. Stay awake!

My dear people: you are awake. We are already on alert. It is this awareness that can actually be quite exhausting.

It is our alertness to what is going on around us that has actually got some of us twitching with anxiety and dread, turning away from media and controversy, covering our heads with our pillows and hiding under our blankets.

The signs of our times are dreadful: there is growing discord and violent tribalism. There is hate spewed and ignorance and bigotry celebrated. There is the suffering of women and children and immigrants and minorities that makes us wake in a sweat in the middle of the night.

The planet groans under the weight of our pollution and toxic cultures. We live in a world of rising temperatures and melting ice.

Forests mowed down, children drowned, a gunman's vile bloodbath at a concert.

Oh, we are awake all right, and we are horrified!

I can honestly say that in all my years as a minister, I have never seen so many preachers asking/preaching/wondering about "the end of days".

Is this it? Can it be that the last bitter days are upon us?

It does not matter if the last days begin today or in a million years.

- **We** have one another to hang-on to. And...
- **We** have the Incarnate One who shared our life of fear, and confusion, and longing, and hope, and despair, and tears, and laughter, and love. We can hang on to Jesus, too.
- **We** have the promise of the love and constancy of our Maker in the midst of the chaotic changes that seek to overwhelm us. We hang on to the presence of the Holy One in us, around us, in all things.
- **As** sure as the sun rises, as sure as elements combine and burn and recombine in the seething heart of all creation...we know that we have our place, our moment, our purpose for living.

We belong here. In the midst of all change, we have our place. We belong with all the rest, communing with all the rest of it, as much as we can. In touch with love and life, in touch with death and pain, too. We are woven into all that life is, and life is filled with change.

It may not be for a long life.

It may not be up front, or on a pedestal.

It may be in a quiet life, lived lovingly, lived humbly.
It may be in the midst of violently changing life, lived urgently.

No one but the Father knows about the length of life and time, Jesus says.
But stay awake, he says. Don't be caught snoozing.
Stay alert.

This life is worth keeping your eyes open for.
This creation may be groaning for completion, as the apostle Paul wrote, but it is a fantastical life in this creation, no matter how incomplete!

Keep your eyes open, Jesus says.

Look for the signs of life that come with change.
Look for the hope that surges out of the human heart, the courage that rises up in the human community, the grace and beauty that sing from the human soul. Stay alert for **these** signs...

Don't be caught napping in the lazy lap of cynicism, eyes shut tight in the crushing embrace of despair.

Beauty is still everywhere. As change is everywhere.
As **God's eternal surprising power and presence** is always here, there and everywhere. In the past, in the present, in the future which we cannot know.
Look, listen, stay awake. **Look for beauty everywhere.**
Look for God's changing power in unlikely, in unexpected places. Look, listen and rejoice in God's power to change everything.
Next week you will hear of the surprising change and the change agents of God, from the gospel of Luke.
Come and be surprised, yet again, by God's changes. Look around you and hunt for the signs of God's changes... keep your eyes open, stay alert.