

Mark 13:24-37^v vi

Jesus said to his disciples: "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then 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. 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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware. keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It 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. Therefore, 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, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

^v About Mark 13:24-37

Chapter 13 of Mark is known as the "little Apocalypse." The Greek word *apokalypsis* means revelation, disclosure or uncovering. Such writing usually comes out of tribulation, which is interpreted through signs and symbols to disclose the unseen reality of God's presence and purpose beneath the appearance of disaster.

Jesus' terse parable about the deputized servants who await the master's return urges us to

live in that balance between keen anticipation and faithful obedience. The former without the latter may lead to idleness and a neglect of service. An unwavering commitment to responsibilities without an eager hope may result in feelings of drudgery and despair or spiritual and moral lassitude. The final word to all is: “Keep awake!”

vi **Reflection and Response**

Anyone who takes today’s readings seriously might emerge from them with fear and trembling. Where is the seasonal sweetness of infants and hay and carols? What kind of Christmas preparation is this?

Perhaps it is the best. The Advent scriptures do not comfort or soothe. They awaken; they nudge; they prod. They call us to alertness. Many of us think we are alert at this time of year, but we are alert to the wrong things. We watch for sales, for gift suggestions and tricks to save time. We look in magazines for festive decorations and hunt recipes for holiday entertaining. And all the while, we miss the point.

The Master is coming, and we are out to lunch. Nothing in Mark’s gospel implies that the Master is cruel or vindictive; the Master is simply more important than any other concerns. We can validate that truth from our own experience. If we are meeting a friend’s flight at the airport, we concentrate on being on time, finding the right gate and planting ourselves squarely where we can see the arriving passengers. We would not waste time at the cocktail lounge or newsstand if the arrival were imminent. We hold fast to one purpose: to wait at the gate.

So it would seem natural that the God who gives us everything might wonder if we are more absorbed in the shopping malls than in God’s coming. Not to condemn the preparations necessary for a festive season: in the right proportion, they are natural and good. But perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are spending an equivalent amount of time in prayer and action for justice. If we are the clay and God is the potter, are we allowing God to shape us into new creations? Or do we in our busy-ness exclude the very One who would mold us into a better life?