

Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent

'And what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake.'

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The Lord speaks to us of His coming. A time that will be *darkness, and not light*. When *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light*. When *the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken*.

Such images given by our Lord seem terrifying, and so they will be, but how could it be otherwise? If Christ, who is *the light of the world*, is to come down to earth *in his glory*, what glory, then, will be left to shine in the heavens?

It is only proper that when *the life who is the light of men* abandons His heaven and dwells on earth, that the heavens should no longer shine, but rather the new creation, which will be filled with the splendor of the Almighty, whose Word will infuse all the redeemed, His Word, *which shall never pass away, even if heaven and earth should pass away*.

Our Lord Jesus says something frightful to us. We do not like to hear our God teach us in this way. We are happy when He says to us that He is the Good Shepherd. We are happy when He says He is the Great Physician. We are happy when He says to us, that *he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; that he desires the death of no man, but that all come to a knowledge of the truth*.

So why, then, does He speak to us today so harshly? Promising the abolition of the heavens, and terror upon the earth? It is so that He may have a good answer to His own question, which He asked, saying: *'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, will He find faith upon the earth?'*

Good Christian, it is the Season of Advent, the time of the Coming of Christ. It is not the time to be complacent, to *eat, drink and be merry*. It is the time to be

sober minded and vigilant, for the coming of the Lord is not to be taken lightly; and never so lightly for a fallen and sinful people; a people such as us.

For behold the lesson of the fig tree, which brings forth its fruit to be harvested in the heat of the summer. When all seems the most lively, the most decadent, the most rich; that is when the crops are reaped, and the fruit of the world is taken into the granaries and barns. So too, in the summer of the world, when the world is seemingly at its zenith, when people will say *peace, peace, when there is no peace*. When there will be *wars and rumors of war*. Then, will the Lord come, with His angel host, *to rend the heavens*, to reap His harvest, both the *wheat and the tares*, the first to be gathered to His presence forever, the latter to be burned with unquenchable fire.

All Christians wonder, on occasion seriously, when will this day come?

Our Lord responds with the strangest of answers: *'But concerning the day and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son.'* But how is this possible? Is the Son not God? Does He not know everything?

But this is to be understood in a simple matter. The Son says that He does not know to mean that He has no intention of telling you, in the same way that a father tells their child who asks incessantly if they can have ice cream after dinner, 'who knows?' Or 'maybe.' It is important that the child not know the answer, so that he will do what is right, that he *might* have a chance of having a kindly dessert.

It has nothing to do with whether the Son truly does not know. What He is telling you is that it is not important that you know, only that He knows. You must merely be ready, and do what is necessary to be prepared; or as He Himself puts it, *'I say to all: Stay awake.'*

For this is not the only occasion where the Son claimed He did not know. Remember the Ten Virgins, how they fell asleep, and became faithless, complacent, and when the bridegroom came, and they were of lack of oil, they arrived late to the feast, and the bridegroom rejected them, saying *'Verily I say to you, I do not know you.'*

And again, when He spoke to the Disciples upon the mount:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

This He spoke of the tree that bears not good fruit, even a fig tree during its time of harvest.

Does Christ speak to us this way merely to terrify us? Far from it. For the true terror lies in not knowing the Light. For whosoever rejects the light will by necessity embrace the *darkness which can be felt*. No. He speaks this way to encourage us to hold fast to the light in the midst of the wicked, corrupt darkness of this world. Because for now, it seems as if what is good and sweet and light is trapped up in heaven, and we *dwell in the darkness*. But in His coming, the Light will leave the heavens, and shine upon the earth. Awake, O Christian, and receive this light, that you may be clothed in glory, when 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*.

It seems odd that as the approach Christmas, the ‘most wonderful time of the year,’ the Church should have us hear of the Day of Judgment, the Second Coming, the Last Things. But this is so that we may live our lives, day to day, holding fast to the light in the midst of the darkness, even as one keeps ever near him a candle in the midst of a power outage on a black winter’s night. Keep it near, O Sinner, and let it warm you,

For the prophet speaks for us in our weakness, the words of repentance, ‘

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;

in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?

We have all become like one who is unclean,

and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf,

and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.’

But let this repentance also see *the light which is coming into the world*, and so speak the words of faith:

*'Be not so terribly angry, O Lord,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.'*

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 64:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37.