

Sermon for the Last Sunday of the Church Year

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.'

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Who then, will *speak of this generation, of the day and the hour?* Who then desires the last day, and to *measure its foundations and bulwarks, that the king of glory may come in?*

We are all prone to wonder with a certain morbid curiosity, or a curious morbidity, about the so-called End Times. We conjecture about it, guess its date, conjure up theories about what this or that prophecy or prediction means, whether the signs of the end are seen happening now in our own time, or soon in a time to come, or perhaps never at all.

The Lord sees into our wondering eye, and speaks to us, as is His custom.

For He tells us that *in those days, after that tribulation, 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. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*

And yet, what are *those days?* Does He speak of the time of the false prophets and antichrists that shall preach in the Lord's name, that time He spoke of only a little before? When many will suffer and be hated and betrayed and persecuted for His *name's sake?* It would seem to be so.

Or perhaps it refers to the crucifixion, when the Son of Man will indeed be seen in *His power and glory, high and lifted up*, when the moon shall be hidden, and the heavenly bodies will cease to shine; when the earth will quake in terror, and angels will proclaim His victory over sin and the grave, first to the women, then the Apostles, then to all the world. Does He, then, speak of His final Passion and

glorification? It would seem to be so.

Or maybe the Lord is pointing ahead, *to His coming to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end*. Is it not when *the dwelling place of God is with men*, that the heavens will be blotted out *with everlasting sunshine, and there will be no night*, for the presence of the Lord will out-shine all the stars of the sky, given for times and seasons, for His season and His time will know no end? When all the faithful will be gathered together from the ends of the earth in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom? Surely, this seems likely too.

And yet, is the end then in the past, or now, or still to come?

So then the Lord tells us to look for the signs, *when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates. 'Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.'*

Yet, what are these signs? The signs of *wars and rumors of war*? These we will have with us always. Is it, then, always the end?

Perhaps the signs of the blotting out of the sun and stars. Has the end already happened? Indeed, after the Resurrection, many were raised from the dead and seen in Jerusalem. Have we indeed been left behind, and not recently, but two millennia past?

Indeed, He tells us that *this generation shall not come to pass before all these have been fulfilled*. And now, the generation of Christ's earthly mission has deceased. Do we then linger on as a generation *untimely born*, wandering the wilderness of a forsaken world?

Or perhaps the generation spoken of is the generation not of an age, but of a people, of the Christian people; perhaps He comforts us, telling us that the Church shall not be destroyed, not even in the time of Christ's final appearing.

But what is the point of telling us when these things will happen, and what to look for, when every sign is open to interpretation, and every prophecy prophesying nothing in particular?

Indeed, even after proclaiming that the Lord knows for sure when all will come to pass, and who will have passed away and who not, He then goes on to tell us that *concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven,*

nor the Son, but only the Father.

Jesus does not even know. So why is He even talking?

We find this all dissatisfying, or even annoying, for we are all prone to wonder with a certain morbid curiosity, or a curious morbidity, about the so-called End Times. We conjecture about it, guess its date, conjure up theories about what this or that prophesy or prediction means, whether the signs of the end are seen happening now in our own time, or soon in a time to come, or perhaps never at all.

But that is the point.

Presumptuous and arrogant man, the Lord has no interest in indulging your curiosity, nor your morbidity. In things of the spirit, speculation must give way to assurance and determination and devotion. In things concerning the end, death must give way to eternity, fulfillment and life.

He confuses us with vague predictions, and vexes us with feigned ignorance, to abolish in us everything that might put His coming, His judgment, His salvation, His final victory far away from us, either in time, or in place, or, worst of all, in thought.

For curiosity is nothing but to make the mind an observer of things. The Christian has no time to observe something far away, but only to keep watch for something imminent, *even at the very gates.*

For the servant that knows not when the master shall return, every day is the last day, for if it is not, he may become complacent and put to rest, *only to be awakened by the rooster's crow, and found unprepared and wanting.*

There is then no last day, and this very second is the last day; Christian, *be sober therefore, be vigilant, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.* [As the old man must watch, for his end comes with his last breath, so even the child keeps watch, even if only toward the font of baptism.]

Work out your faith with fear and trembling, and ever hear the command of the Lord: Stay Awake.

Learn, then, the lesson of the fig tree. We know not when summer, the season of

life will come. Yet the tree knows, and puts out its leaves at the proper time. So you too need not know the day nor the hour; Christ, who is the Tree of Life, knows when His season is to begin, when His glory shall drive away the days of darkness and cold of death. It is His to know, for He is the only begotten of the Father. It is not yours to know. It is only yours to *stay awake*,

So that when the Lord comes descending upon a cloud, accompanied by angelic hosts, we might not tarry nor startle, but look up to the verdancy of that tree, and the beauty of His season, and with all our reason and senses, as without a note of surprise or suspense, speak quietly these words: 'Behold:

My righteousness draws near."

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 51:4-6; Jude 20-25; Mark 13 :24-37.