

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Mark 13: 24-37 **“Longing”** (11/27/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God’s peace to you!

Let us read from the gospel of Mark, chapter 13, the verses 24-37 and see then afterwards again, what has become important to you while reading.

The Coming of the Son of Man

24 ‘But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. ²⁷Then 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.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

28 ‘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. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹**Heaven and earth will**

pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

*32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33 Beware, keep alert;** for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It 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. ³⁵Therefore, 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, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'*

AMEN.

Which sentence, sequence or word has become important to you while reading? And why? ...

In most cases we don't like words about the end of the world. We usually don't believe in apocalyptic prophecies – we know that they are old and that so far all the ones with concrete date and time announcements got proved so far wrong. And anyway: Are we not smart enough to see when we hurt ourselves and would not our markets say already stop when something would go wrong?

But it is pretty unlikely that the people who heard the texts the first

time and wrote them down were fearful at all. We know that still around the year 150 (AC) a small group of Christians in Rome prepared themselves for Easter by expecting the end of the world, taking the gospel of Marc literally: ³⁰*Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.*” For them it was the right interpretation of the Lords’ Prayer “thy kingdom come”.

It depends on the present situation we are in, if the end of something feels as a catastrophe or as luck. The early church probably suffered more from the world as the church feared the end of the world.

When we hear a text like ours we imagine the drama of a cosmos. This is the reason, why so many believe in a concrete end of the world. The ecological crises, our greedy life style could certainly lead to this kind of apocalypse [apó-kalyps]. But this was nothing the later Judaism or Jesus would have been able to anticipate already. For both the talking about the end of the world was meant symbolically. Jesus refers not to the end of the outer world. He asks: What can and should end to start a new life, through which we could look up to the clouds of the skies and through which we could get closer to the humanity we are longing for.

Whenever the world a person lives in, collapses, for this person a whole world collapses literally. This applied for Mark, who witnessed the downfall of Jerusalem in the year 70 AC. It also applied to Augustine, when the West Goth King Alaric I. took Rome on August

24th, 410 AC. Back then the non-Christians declared that the antic Rome could have been taken only because it did not follow the old Gods and that the Christians would be responsible. Augustine himself declared that a new world order would have started now. He was relatively right: The antic world sank, the Middle Ages began.

It is always the same experience: We don't understand God anymore, when everything you believe in degrades to dust. Who wants to live anymore, when his Gods have died, his temples have been devastated and his cities been burned? 1945 a similar apocalyptic atmosphere existed in After-war Germany and theologians saw in the new founded state of Israel an eschatological sign for a coming new world.

But in truth all apocalyptic perceptions are expressions of perfected emotional distress. If we look from outside, it seems to be ridiculous that the affected person could mix his small world up with the whole world. But cannot a single step onto an ant nest destroy a whole world? When we don't know further from our perspective, then our world is at its end; we experience the end of the world. The old flood mythologies of the nations formulate it all over: When something comes to an end, we have the ultimate chance to understand, WHY the breakdown was probably inevitable, in a specific sense even desirable. On one point it doesn't function anymore as we were used to; we are at the end with our excuses, muddiness, secret complicities and double standards.

It is not anymore about turning the spill to the next so called “success’. It is about giving up the measures of values, others might follow and devaluating the ideals, all the others still have. Those, who become dropouts like Jesus, will shorten the days of the old world, which has to cease, so that the kingdom of God can become reality.

Jesus asks us to look forward to the summer. This seems to be a little bit funny, as we still expect first the winter now. But “*as soon as the Fig Tree’s branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near*”. And then you know that it will carry fruit, that you will get nurtured and that the time of fulfillment will be imminent.

How much must be destroyed until the world begins, for which we are born in truth? How many of our values must collapse first, before we understand God deeper? In our hearts we understand so easy what humanity is; we don’t need therefore big words. We world we trust in, doesn’t know anything about borders among people. And you can understand this explicit also politically: According to the way how we deal with social class differences within our nation as well as we deal as nation with developing countries. The world we wait for and the only one in which we could live humane, needs to be carried by understanding for each other and the universal helpfulness according each human affliction. In the end the only purpose of our life is: To hand it over to God.

Please allow me finally to comment on the last part of our text. Like in the Parable of the Bridesmaids Jesus asks us also here to be alert. Unfortunately religious language is often capable of being misunderstood. "Be alert!" Do we not suffer enough of restlessness? Is not already for decades now sleeplessness and rushing main fellow in our lives? How often do we long for a simple rest in all this stress, at least to have the ability to close for some time our tired eyes?

It sounds paradox, but Jesus talks exactly to us in this, our situation. There is running, whose ONLY purpose it is NOT to awake, NOT to come to consciousness about the own depending situation. A famous example is Adolf Hitler's armament minister, Albert Speer. In his memoires he reports how restless he got towards the end of World War II, during the by bomb attacks disrupted nights. As if this hypnotic will to work, the sleeplessness had only ONE purpose: Not to awake, and to see the horrible and criminal reality, he had helped to create himself.

How many of you had in your work life the chance to have 6 weeks of vacation on one piece? How many of you need already several jobs just to survive? Who tells you that the reality we live in is set in stone? Jesus arouses [e-ráuses], when he says in his last big speech of the Mark gospel: "Beware, keep alert!" Stop running like a maniac! Stop running along the reality with its brutal stoniness and bleakly petrification. Stop making yourself to slaves and gods sacrifices of expectations and programs of others. Give your opinion on who you

are. Don't live anymore in the illusions of your self-antagonisms, resist what hinders you to become yourself! Whoever is restless, has no hold in him- or herself, flees like so many in the 60s into drugs or like today into work. Sleeping means then: To wish nothing to see and hear anymore; Simply to forget the own despair and trying to function. Who is sleepless has no past as he never lived himself. Who is sleepless has no future as he doesn't expect anything anymore.

To be alert means for Jesus exactly the opposite: You don't need to be in the treadmill of other people's dictates. Liberate yourself for the call God has for you. Figure out your being and be a Christian, which means here: To stand with your faith brothers and sisters for a world, in which we ALL are able to live our calls.

The first Jesus words in the Mark gospel were the promise: "The kingdom of God is near; repent!" (1:15). His last words promise now that no stone will be anymore on another. (13:2) Yes, we all know that the Kingdom of God has not come in the last 2000 years. But the world, we think we know so well, is based on the pillars, Jesus shakes: Profit greed and power. The profit greed destroys Gods creation, debases men and misuses therefore God as alibi [aelibei]. Power plays one person off against another person, stirring up fear about each other. Jesus word goes back to the beginnings of his teaching: That God is close only to those, who are hungry and thirsty for justice, who don't want to remain in the status quo, but do yearn

for another world, which they carry already in their hearts. THIS is what Jesus requests a last time, immediately before his suffering begins: That we shall have the forehead to look forward, through the darkness, to believe in a new time. These were the prayers of the early church and with them already the first Christians celebrated in communion the community of Jesus return.

Today we have lit the first Advent candle: The candle of hope. May the world of devastation, comfort, greedy lobby egoism and party conflicts be overcome! But may therefore come the kingdom of peace, mercy, courage, individual freedom and happiness. Let us be alert above each seed of hope; as Christians we are keepers of this longing fire!

AMEN!