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**Weekend of Sunday, November 29, 2020**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9**  
**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9**  
**Gospel Reading: Mark 13:24-37**  
**Sermon Title: “The Whole World Cries Out”**

## **Theme**

*Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.*

## **Text**

[Jesus said:] <sup>24</sup>“In those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.

<sup>27</sup>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.

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

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

## Sermon

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah lived in a challenging time. He and the Israelites had been under the strong cruel boot of the Babylonians for hundreds of years. For Isaiah and his people, it was as if the whole world was crying out. And so he sought the will of the LORD on behalf of his people.

Previous prophecies by Isaiah had indicated that the end of their troubles was near, but for the LORD a day is like a thousand years, and so the people were left to wait.

I think we can all agree that we find ourselves living in a challenging time too. Our lives feel like they are on hold. We thought if we isolated ourselves in March and April we could get the Coronavirus under control. “Flatten the curve,” they said. Remember that? But now we are told that it is worse by magnitudes.

Joan and I foolishly thought that no matter when we were allowed to come back to worship, we would celebrate Easter – like we ourselves were experiencing a resurrection – coming out of our isolations to enter the Sanctuary of the LORD in all its glory. Well, you probably noticed that never happened. Our reopening was soft at best. And look at us now, in our fifth month out of isolation. We can’t sing our praises to the LORD. We can’t pass the peace and share Christian love. We are tired of it, and we are not alone. The whole world cries out.

It sounds absolutely terrifying, doesn’t it? I’m speaking of Jesus in the Gospel Reading now. If there is one thing we have learned that we can count on it is the light and course of the Sun and the Moon. Oh, earthbound astronomers and other scientists make discoveries about space often. And you know about Voyager 1 launched by NASA in 1977. It left our solar system in 2012 and is now traveling into interstellar space. Though it was launched 43 years ago, it is still working and in communication with NASA’s Deep Space Network. When we consider the vastness of space, we are reminded of how inconsequential we are. But I digress.

Back to the Gospel Reading, it sounds absolutely terrifying that the sun and the moon will go dark. Eight minutes and twenty seconds later we would experience near-total darkness. I say “near-total darkness” because we would still have the light of the other stars and planets in the sky. But wait a minute, in verse 25 Jesus

said the stars will fall from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. I don't know what that means exactly but I suspect it's bad, real bad.

After that Jesus said,

<sup>26</sup>Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

Well, I'm not going to tell Jesus he's wrong, but with no light, we won't see the Son of Man coming in clouds. It was probably good planning that he arranged to send out his angels to gather the faithful.

I think it is safe to say that Jesus was using hyperbole to explain the end of the age. It is going to be frightening, terrifying, fearsome! But ... there is nothing for us to worry about, we that are among the faithful.

Now, do I believe it's going to happen just like that? No, but what I think doesn't matter. But I do think Jesus is trying to get our attention.

The Triune God created the universe and all that is in it out of love - including human beings on the planet Earth. Do I think that God will destroy that which God loves? No, I don't think so. So what I think is going on in this Gospel Reading is that, just as creation had a beginning, creation will also have an end, and between those two points, it should be each individual's objective to come to faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ, because salvation for eternal life comes through him.

Now you may think that Jesus' prophecy sounds rather ominous and threatening, like the long-haired prophet who carries the sign that says, "The end is near." Who knows? I don't. Jesus doesn't. Human beings have but one earthly life to live and Jesus desires that every one of God's beloved creatures is saved for eternity. Hmm, that doesn't sound like we're inconsequential to God! So Jesus is telling us, now is the time to be alert and ready! And Jesus said that with intensity!

And yet, two-thousand years have passed and he has not yet returned. This is to the benefit of all human beings. But rather than lose our spiritual sharpness we should look at this time to multiply our efforts to be prepared.

**Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

I assure you that this Advent and Christmas season will be unlike any that any of us have ever experienced. There will be few parties and family get-togethers or at least that is what the public health officials are telling us to do.

So I have a great idea. Let us take this opportunity to grow in faith and love and demonstrate that faith and love with godly behaviors. Then, if the Lord Jesus returns this year, well and good, we're ready. If he doesn't, then we are all the more ready for when he does.

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord Jesus, we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit to give us the encouragement we need to grow in faith and love toward you. Make us watchful so that we are ready to welcome your return at any time. We pray this in your holy name. Amen