

HEBREWS 10:11-25 (p. 973)

NOVEMBER 14, 2021

MARK 13:1-13 (p. 825)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Help us to see the Truth, Lord. And then, to apply that Truth to our lives. Help us to know you, intimately, through our prayers and our study of your Word. And then, help us to boldly stand-up for what we know, and what we believe, as we witness to your world. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

“WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?”

The sign above the Ticket Window at the Sports Stadium, in great big bold red letters read, “We’ll sell you the whole seat for the game! But you’re only going to need the edge of it!” I like that! It creates anticipation, promises excitement! Like the fourth quarter of the Michigan/Michigan State game a couple weeks ago! People were definitely on the edge of their seats, right! There was excitement and enthusiasm! A sense of hope maybe, or disappointment, but certainly expectation!

And for some, that’s when the pulse starts racing! Your heart begins to thump in your chest! The adrenaline courses through your veins! That’s what “Living on the Edge” is all about, right! It’s exhilarating!

For others though, it feels like just too much! You can’t Live on the Edge, they say, it’ll kill you! The heightened heart rate! The constant adrenaline-rush! Your body will eventually wear out! Your mind will simply shut down! Living on the edge is dangerous!

And still others are somewhere in between. It's okay to visit the Edge. Periodically. In fact, you should! You can even spend time there. Occasionally. In small doses, of course. But you can't stay there! After a while you need to back away, right! Relax! Get more comfortable! Find that sense of peace and security! Wait for things to settle, right? And you'll do whatever it takes to get there!

So, where are you? It's an interesting question, don't you think? Where are you? What starts your blood pumping, if anything? March Madness? Michigan/Michigan State? The Lions, or Tigers? The Packers! Frankfort or Benzie? Manchester United? What about tomorrow, as we sit here on the Eve of St. Venison's Day? How about the Holidays, especially after last year? Black Friday Sales, again after last year? What gets you excited, manifests anticipation? Thinking about the future? Remembering the past? How about taking an honest assessment of what is currently happening in the world?

I'm wondering what moves you to the edge of your seat. And I'm asking, because Jesus' lesson from Mark is designed to put us on edge. "Watch out," says the Lord! "Be on your guard!" "Be alert!" "Pay attention to what you see!" "Don't let the Son of Man find you sleeping when He returns!"

Jesus and His Disciples are coming out of the Great Temple, and the atmosphere is one of anticipation, excitement, expectation! The Faithful have been waiting and watching for the coming of Messiah for a very long time!

The Prophets repeatedly predicted that He would come! The Teachers of the Law reminded people time and again to keep watch! And those who waited with their eyes open could see the stage being set! Others were distracted though. Wrapped up in their daily lives. Comfortable. Secure. And when Jesus came, they missed it!

As they walk along, the Disciples are impressed, impressed with what they see, impressed with what it stands for! The Great Temple seems so timeless, safe and secure, the very bastion of their National Identity! Built by Solomon! Destroyed by the Babylonians in the Sixth Century BC! Rebuilt by Ezra! Expanded by Herod! They are in awe! Some of those stones in the Temple Mount were over fifteen feet high, thirty feet deep, sixty feet long, and cut from a single slab of limestone!

The Disciples are impressed with the man-made structures, and man-made institutions. That's pretty clear! But Jesus looks past all of that, to the things of God! He talks about how all of this will be gone someday! Jesus actually predicts how the Romans, in less than a generation will raise it all to the ground, leaving not one stone standing upon another! And then, our Lord goes on to talk about how God will do the same thing with all earthly institutions, with the whole planet even, somewhere further down the line!

This entire Chapter of Mark's Gospel is supposed to scoot us to the edge of our seats, raise our pulse! That's the purpose! In the midst of their slumber, Jesus warns them to wake up, telling those who follow Him about the "Signs" that will accompany the End of Time! What could possibly be more important than that?

Scholars call this section, “Mark’s Mini-Apocalypse”! The wording is “Apocalyptic”, reminiscent of Daniel and Revelation! This style of writing uses symbols and imagery, sometimes clever and meaningful symbols and imagery, to describe the End of the World! And in doing so, it paints a Word Picture, one designed to put us on the edge of our seat!

It’s not exactly a fun chapter though, is it? I mean who wants to hear about the End of the World? Oh, I get that some people are infatuated with the thought! But there are others who just want to write it off. Or assign it to the past, or the distant future! Or dismiss it completely! And I get that too! But Jesus doesn’t stand at either pole. And He doesn’t let us do so either! He says don’t let these things frighten you! Don’t get all hung up on the future, even when you see these things happening! But keep watch! Pay attention! Don’t get so complacent with the status quo that you are not living on the edge of your seat!

So, I’m curious. Are you? Living on the edge of your seat, I mean? If not, what would move you there? What would build the drama for you? Maybe you are one who stays there all the time, in a constant state of expectation. Or maybe you are one who avoids going there at all. But what would it take to excite you just a bit more? You know, cause a little anticipation? Did you in fact scoot forward some, as we read today’s lesson? Because that was the Lord’s intention.

Today's text comes at an interesting time in Jesus' ministry. At a telling time, really. Just prior to this, Jesus cursed a fig tree for not producing fruit. That tree is symbolic of the Temple, of course, and the so-called religious people of that day, who likewise are not producing fruit. Jesus then goes on to turn over the tables of the money changers, again critiquing what Worship has become.

He then warns us that a lot of bad things are going to come our way! Nature will stand on end! Folks around you will turn against you! People will persecute you for your Faith! Lots of False Teachers will come on the scene, saying whatever it is that people want to hear! And you need to pay attention to all of this, and stand firm in your Faith!

Don't freak out, He says! But don't get complacent either! Just do the things that I have called you to do! Be the people that I have called you to be! Witness to the Truth! Point to Me in all that you say and do! And everything will work out just the way it should!

So, let me ask you. Are you, like the Disciples, impressed with the man-made systems and structures around you? Are you feeling safe, and at peace? Are you happy with the trajectory of our World, our Country, the Church? Or are you currently a bit nervous? Anxious maybe? Concerned? Because I'm going to try and move you forward a bit more in your seat.

Thursday was Veterans Day, right! And I have a special place in my heart for those in the military, and their families. So, Wars and Rumors of Wars get my attention? You know, Nation rising against Nation, just like Jesus predicts?

Did you by chance notice Iran's drone strike the other day, trying to take out Iraq's Prime Minister? Or hear the State Department Officials say it was Iran who attacked that US Base in Syria? Did you read the New York Times article back in September that said Iran "is within one month of accumulating enough nuclear material for a warhead"?

Did you sit up when you heard on Friday that Russia is amassing troops and Tank Battalions on the Ukrainian border, threatening to start World War Three? Or when China flew one hundred and fifty planes over Taiwan, threatening the very same thing? They have had twenty Nuclear Missile Silos for decades, by-the-way. But currently, they are construction over two hundred more! Did it make you jump when they caught the West flat footed recently, testing a brand new Hyper-Sonic Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, capable of hitting any target, anywhere in the world? Or last week, when the Government warned their citizens to "stock up on food and staples", in order to be prepared? Talk about Wars and Rumors of Wars!

But what excites you? Earthquakes maybe, in various places? Fourteen thousand four hundred and fifty-five so far this year, all above 4.0 on the Richter Scale. Thirteen thousand six hundred and fifty-two last year. Twelve thousand nine hundred and eighty-one in 2019. The numbers keep growing. Almost like birth pains!

How about famine? The United Nations News service reported that “forty-one million people, in forty-three countries, are teetering on the very edge of famine. Up from twenty-seven million just two years ago”! They also said that currently, “in Afghanistan, over half of the population is facing hunger issues”!

Jesus also mentions people being persecuted for their Faith. According to Open Door USA, “It may be surprising, but Christian persecution around the world is one of the biggest human rights issues of this era. Over 340 million Christians currently reside in places that experience high levels of persecution and discrimination”

A speech to the United Nations Human Rights Council in May of 2013, reported that “more than 100,000 Christians are violently killed because of their Faith every year”! A December 2016 report stated that between 2005 and 2015, there were over 900,000 Christian Martyrs Worldwide! And about that part where Jesus talks about the “Gospel being preached throughout the entire world” prior the End! Well according to Wikipedia, “the full Bible has been translated into 704 languages, the New Testament into an additional 1,551 languages, with excerpts and Bible stories into another 1,160 languages! That means portions of the Bible now exist in 3,415 different languages, what another website estimates to be 98% of the planet!

I am not trying to be melodramatic! Well, maybe a bit! But I am trying to get you to scoot up in your seat a bit! You are in THE GAME, the BIG GAME, the GAME OF YOUR LIFE! And hopefully you are playing your heart out, not just watching!

But ask yourself if you are sitting on the edge of your seat, seeing every single play, cheering as the ball approaches the Goal Line! Or if you are watching causally, only looking up every now and then, and only between hotdogs! Or if you are slumped over in your seat, scrunched all the way to the back, totally distracted by Candy Crush or Facebook, or something else on your I-Phone? Because the GAME is being played!

Look Jesus, look at these magnificent buildings! Look Jesus, look at what man can do! Aren't we amazing! Are you on the edge of your seat? Because I have one last try!

According to the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam, and the Hadith, their Holy Writings, the End of Time will take place when a great Muslim Nation is established, a Caliphate! Think ISIS, the Islamic State in Syria! Or ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. "At that time, the blood will be knee-high," it says. Not as deep as a "horse's bridal" as described in Revelation, but pretty close! And "Yesua", the "son of Mary", it says, will come on the clouds and fight alongside the Caliphate, against the Anti-Christ, or Dajjal, converting everyone to Islam!

So, what if you knew? What if you saw the End coming? What would you do? What would you not do? What would you do differently? Would tidying up all those loose ends at work have the same priority? Would finishing all those projects at home? What would change? How about reconciling that fractured relationship with a friend? What about finding a way to touch a child's heart, or leave a mark on the world? Would you pray more? Go to church more? Become more generous? Live better, and love more?

Do you think that you would take the time to draw closer to the Lord, and to each other in His Name? Should it take the threat of the End of the World to make you focus on what's really important though? "Keep watch," says the Lord. "Don't let the Son of Man find you sleeping when He returns." "You'll know the season, if you pay attention!". So, look around! What do you see?

Let me be clear! These "Signs" are not warnings to buy "Fire Insurance", or to buy "Hell Fire Insurance"! The point that Jesus was trying to make is for all Believers to watch—to be prepared—to persevere in the midst of the struggles that are going to happen! We are called to dig deep, and continue to be enthusiastic and energetic about a Faith that will not be popular with the world around us! We are cautioned to keep our Faith, even in the midst of persecution, even when there is a definite cost!

So, what does that look like? How do we keep from being the church of Laodicea mentioned in Revelation, the lukewarm, stagnant church, that Jesus spits out of His mouth when He returns? How do we keep from being complacent? How do we truly pay attention, stay alert? Well, I noticed that our reading from Hebrews this morning has a few suggestions. Maybe we should all post them on our refrigerators, and look at them daily!

"Draw near to God with sincere hearts, and in full assurance of Faith." "Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

That might bear repeating. Especially because of COVID, especially because of the response to COVID! In case you haven't noticed, the Church around the world has changed in the last eighteen months, including attendance! Lots of folks are finding it far easier to stay at home, in their Jammies, no longer meeting together!

“Draw near to God with sincere hearts, and in full assurance of Faith.” “Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.” “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

In other words, live on the edge of your seats, not with your head in the sand! Be a bold and powerful witness to Jesus Christ, even when, or especially when it gets hard! Do it, with sincere hearts, in both the good times and bad! And all of God's people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lord, as your people, we are moved by your love and quickened by your Grace! We are empowered by your hand in our lives, and blessed by your Presence! And for these gifts we turn to you now in thanks! We are called to you, by the voice of your Holy Spirit, and gathered together into community in the Name of your Son, Jesus Christ. And for these gifts as well, we praise you now! We exalt you and Worship you Lord, as the very center of our lives! We honor you, as our Creator and our God!

Holy Father, we realize that all that we have, and all that we do, come to us through you. We acknowledge that, as Followers of Jesus, we do not make our own way in our journey through this life. But are called to follow your guiding path, eventually reaching the destination that you have laid out for each one of us, eventually arriving at the place that you have prepared, the place you wish us to be! And in knowing this Lord, and claiming it, we can rest in your Peace.

But we also know Lord that you have arranged things in such a way that there is Power in our asking. You have designed the world so that our Prayers and our Petitions to you, open up the floodgates of your love! You have set things up, in such a way, that in coming to you on our knees, we receive the blessings that you are waiting to bestow. And as such, Father, humbly and on our knees, we come before you now. This morning we lift up..... We ask for your Blessings and your Grace in each of your servant's lives. We ask for security and health, for comfort and guidance, and for your power and your presence with each loved one. We place them, as well as ourselves before your Altar of Grace this very moment! And we do this in Jesus' Name, praying the very prayer that He taught us saying, Our Father...