

First Sunday of Advent, Gospel Year B

A Threat or a Promise?

Mark 13:24-37

First Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

*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.

*26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with
great power and glory. 27 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.*

*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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you
know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly 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.*

*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. 34 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. 35 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”



DIAGNOSIS: The Threat of Jesus' Return

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Expectations.

We fall prey to two tendencies: expecting too little and expecting too much. Maybe you did this in the recent election. You thought, “Nothing is going to change. Who are we kidding? It doesn't matter who is elected. Politics is corrupt, desperately corrupt. Money controls everything in Washington. Why bother getting involved.” Or you thought, “Maybe this time things will be different. Maybe the voters of America will rise up and say ‘No more!’ to corruption, lies, injustice, and violence. Maybe change is coming, and I'm going to make it my business to be part of it.” We have power. We can make a difference!

.Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Forgetfulness?

We are seduced by this present age. We are all wrapped up in the Now and have forgotten about the Not Yet. For those of us who are hurtling towards despair, the tears in our eyes, and the rage in our hearts keeps us from seeing the buds on the trees. We see only an endless winter of injustice and violence before us. We don't notice that even when it is still cold and wintry, life is stirring all 'round. For those of us who are sporting the rose-colored glasses and gaining our inspiration from Norman Vincent Peale, we fail to recognize our identity as servants of a household. Amnesia has set in. Somehow, we have begun to act as though the owner of the house handed over the deed to us and the last words we heard were, "Party Hearty!", instead of "Beware! Keep alert!"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Surprise!

"Jesus has returned! Jesus has returned!" We see the text on our cell phone and we can hardly believe it. We who had despaired of him ever returning are reduced to weeping. How could we have been so faithless? How could we have ever doubted him? What will become of us now? My Lord, what a mornin'! The response of those of us who have been at our ease, certain that we were in charge is, "Jeezuz! He's returned?!" We can hardly believe it. Why didn't he give us a little warning? It sure would have been nice if he'd at least given us time to clean up the place before he got back home. What are we going to do? We are in for it now.

PROGNOSIS: The Promise of Jesus' Return



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): My Lord, What a Mornin'!

My Lord, what a mornin'! It's true: the stars have begun to fall from the sky, the sun is dark in the middle of the day, the moon gives no light, and the powers in the heavens are shaken. And yet, in the midst of that darkest day comes a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But that's not all. The temple curtain is torn in two, from top to bottom, and one who witnesses this utters an awe-filled prayer to himself, "Truly, this man was God's Son." Jesus has returned "with great power and glory," but it is not the glory we expected; it is the glory of the Cross. It is the world-turned-upside-down kind of glory where the meek, the mourning, the poor in spirit and those longing for justice are called blessed.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The Sinners Cry

We who despaired of ever finding a reason for hope now have awakened to a new season. We have been startled to hear the word "elect" used in relation to us. Us, elect? Us, chosen? Us, given a promise, an identity, and a calling? We rub our eyes in disbelief. The world is still a mess, but maybe it is true; maybe we do have a job to do. Those of us who presumed upon God's mercy and have rightly been found guilty of a blinding pride are also startled. We are startled at the forgiveness offered to us. "You did not choose me; I chose you; now go, and bear fruit, fruit that will last." We have been given another chance at being faithful servants in the household. We too realize that we have been given a promise, an identity, and a calling.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Pure Joy

Life is no longer only about the Now; it is also about the Not Yet. Life is about what Jesus is calling us to. Heaven and earth may pass away, but we know now that the words of Jesus will never pass away. The kingdom of God is beginning to emerge amongst us and we are privileged to see it and participate in it. Do we immerse ourselves in justice work? Yes, in the ways that God calls us, realizing that there are many ways to do this work. Do we run for office? Maybe we will, again, if that is our calling. Will we announce to all we encounter, in both word and deed, that Jesus is the master of this house and we are simply grateful servants, privileged to be called into service? Yes, we will. The result? Joy, pure joy.