

“The grace of God given to you”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday November 29, 2020

Mark 13:24-37

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

In this first Sunday in Advent we begin by recognizing that Jesus is going to return. Jesus warns us that all kinds of things are going to happen, signs and portents in the skies, the very heavens are going to be shaken.

And I have to say, living in the midst of a pandemic, my world is certainly shaking a little. There is a lot of upheaval.

Jesus also said no one would know the day or hour of his return.

We don't deal with uncertainty.

I was meeting with a group of soldiers who had been deployed in Afghanistan, and though they were on different tours, all of them had their tour extended.

They thought they were there for 6 months or 7 months.

They had their start date and their finish date, they had things organized at home; they went off to serve our country.

Towards the end of their tours, they got word that they weren't able to go home, things were being extended.

And all of them talked about how hard that news was.

It was terrible for morale, especially when they first got the news.

All of them became depressed to some extent or other.

They didn't have clear date for the end of their tour.

The uncertainty of it took its toll on all of them.

That's part of our battle with this pandemic.

If only when we knew when it would end, it would be easier to cope.

How long is this marathon?

We don't like unknowns.

What will the future hold?

It all seems so uncertain.

We want details, a time-line, a comprehensive explanation.
We don't get one.

And yet the word from Jesus is that things are certain, God's plan is being accomplished.

Jesus continues:

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...

Jesus makes it very clear that no one knows when he is going to return, but it certainly is going to happen.

Nothing in God's plan for his people is improvised, nothing is left to chance.
God's plan is even now being accomplished.
God's kingdom is coming.

The Apostle Paul's job was to help the church to be ready for Jesus' return.
And so as we turn to God's word, spoken through Paul, we read that not only are things as they should be, but we everything we need for this time.

We, the church, have everything we need as we wait and watch, and continue doing the work we were left to do, until the day of Jesus' arrival.

Paul says:

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There were lots of problems in the church in Corinth as the letter unfolds Paul addresses all kinds of issues.

We finished reading at verse 9, in verse 10 Paul begins with some of the troubling things that are happening in the church.

But Paul makes it clear at the outset of the letter that the church has all that it needs. They have been enriched in Jesus, all the gifts of God have been poured out on them, the testimony of the gospel has been strengthened in their midst, they have all they need as they wait for the revealing of Jesus.

The Message translates it like this:

Just think—you don't need a thing, you've got it all! All God's gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale. And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus. God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that.

God shares with us the life of his Son.

We live this life, this day, this season of pandemic, this advent season of waiting, in Jesus.

God who started us in this spiritual adventure is with us til the end, and God knows when that will be.

We have work to do.

God has entrusted us with sharing the life of Christ with others.

But we have the tools we need.

We have each other, and we have the Holy Spirit in our midst helping us.

Our hope lies entirely with God.

Our hope, our strength, lies with nothing and no one else.

Science isn't going to save us.

Politics isn't going to save us.

Our hope isn't in the banks, in technology, in our capacity or in a new discovery.

We are capable of great discoveries that add beauty, wonder, goodness and healing to this world.

But our hope is always God-grounded.

For we know that when God's peace and righteousness come to this world, they come with judgment, sin is judged, evil routed, and a death blow is struck to knock out Death itself.

Such hope mourns the evils of this age, prays to God for forgiveness, knows the poverty of our own power, and hungers and thirsts for the kingdom, and for all of us to live in the shalom of God.

Such hope lives by the vision of God setting things right in the new creation. And we work alongside of God's work- we invest ourselves, our talents, our gifts, our prayers in this vision, trusting that *God himself is right alongside to keep us steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus.*

And that God, who got us started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son Jesus. He will never give up on us.

Thanks be to God.