

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church**  
2368 Eggert Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150

Advent 1-B

November 27, 2011

Mark 13:24-37

**“While the Teacher is away....  
Preparations for the Second Coming of Christ”**

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From Charles Swindoll's book of "Illustrations and Quotes," Swindoll writes, "I worked in a machine shop for four and a half years alongside a fellow named George. His job was to sweep and clean out the shavings from underneath the huge lathes and machines we were operating. George was a baptized Christian who loved the teaching of Scripture on prophecy. I remember hearing him sing hymns as he worked. Many of these hymns had to do with the coming of Christ.

Late on Friday afternoon, about ten minutes before quitting time when we were all weary, I looked at George and said, 'George, are you ready?' He replied, 'Uh-huh.' But he was all dirty from the day's work. He obviously was just not ready to quit. In fact, he looked like he was ready to keep on working! Again, I said, 'Are you ready to go home?' He said, 'Yeah, I am ready.' I replied, 'Look at you, Man, you are not ready. You gotta go clean-up.' 'No,' he said, 'let me show you something.' So he unzipped his overalls and underneath were the neatest, cleanest clothes you can imagine. He had them all ready. All he did when the whistle blew was just unzip and step out of the overalls, walk up to and punch his clock, and he was gone. He said, 'You see, I stay ready to keep from having to get ready - just like I am ready for Jesus.'"

"You see, I stay ready - to keep from having to get ready - just like I am ready for Jesus." George lived the full and complete meaning of the season of Advent and Mark's Gospel message for today.

A bit of seasonal trivia: Today is "New Year's Day" for the Church. We move from lectionary readings year "A" to those designated for year "B." The liturgical color for this season traditionally is purple, but blue is quickly becoming just as traditional as well; blue - for the Blessed Virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus. For in Advent we look not only back in history to the first coming of our Lord as baby Jesus, but we also look forward to Christ's second coming - an event that will totally and completely be different from His first appearance on this earth, as our Gospel passage from Mark shares with us.

When I was classroom teacher in the public school system, there would be a few times I would be called out of the room, even if it were just to step into the hallway. This meant that the students would be left alone for a brief period of

time. I do not think it would take much reflection on our part to remember back when we were in school and the teacher was called out of the classroom. Remember the flush of excitement when the teacher announced to the class that he or she needed to leave the classroom for a minute? All right – let the good times roll!

The teacher may well have prepared the class by saying something to the effect, “Now, class, I am going down the hall to the office for just a minute. While I’m gone, I trust each and every one of you to act like ladies and gentlemen. Each of you has work to do. I will be right back.

Expecting us to act like ladies and gentlemen while he/she is gone. Yeah, sure...

And what happened as soon as the teacher went out the door? I remember quite well when I was in school, when the teacher needed to leave the room for a bit, pandemonium usually broke out. Oh, yes, some students attempted to work, while others made spitballs, paper airplanes, others wondered around the room talking to some, poking others, and so forth. One or two students would watch the door, listening for the teacher’s return, while their buddies ransacked the room, wrote on the chalkboard, or did something to one of the teacher’s books. And where was I while all this was going down? I’ll never tell...

What we did not realize then, and many of us still have not learned, when the teacher is away, that situation, that opportunity of choosing *correct* expected behavior, becomes a test, a test many fail. Our Old Testament lesson and the gospel passage for today shares with us that the Teacher, Christ, is away. We are being tested. So, how is our behavior? Is it as Christ the Teacher would want us to be?

We are living between times, between times of Christ’s first coming – as a babe in a manger – and his second coming – as Lord and King! And while He is away, the Lord expects us to be doing His work.

The people to whom Isaiah in this morning’s Old Testament reading refers are in danger of being overtaken by the Assyrians, and they are calling upon God to intervene. The people acknowledge the power and the awesomeness of God. But they also remember their own sinfulness. In God’s seemingly absence from them, they sinned. While the Teacher, the Lord, was away, the people sinned. In their darkest hour, they humble themselves before God and repented. And in their repentance, acknowledge that they are not the ones in control, but God is.

It is here that we have those wonderful spiritual words of scripture, "...we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand." "You made us, and not we ourselves."

In Mark 13, we read that Jesus will indeed come back, coming in clouds with great glory and power. But not right away. Jesus then tells a short parable about a man going on a journey. But, before he leaves, he gives his slaves, his servants, work to do. Isn't this just what a teacher may do when needing to leave the classroom for a bit?

And the response? Just like in Isaiah, just like in the classroom, people had not obeyed God. The chaos that we may have experienced in the classroom as students now spills over into the adult world. The human spirit has not changed. Instead of engaging in activities that pleases the human spirit of doing our own thing, we are expected to live a life Christ will honor and reward. We are to live a life just as if Jesus (the Teacher) never left the classroom of the world.

As Isaiah's Israel longed for God's coming to save them from their enemies, we wait for the time when this classroom earth will be a place of harmony and peace. We long for the time when all things will finally be straightened out. We long for the time when the wicked will perish and the faithful receive their just reward. Yes, we long for this time, but we are not to be overly concerned about just when it will come.

We need not to worry, for we all have the Lord's work to do. The Teacher, Jesus Christ, has given us an assignment, and it will be collected and graded when Jesus comes back to claim his classroom earth for himself once again. God the Father will honor that work and keep his promise to be merciful and kind to those who live by faith in him.

The Teacher is away from classroom earth for now, and He will return. The Teacher will come back, and the faithful as well as the unfaithful, will see him coming. They all will see him coming with his angels in the clouds, coming with great glory and power. There finally will be justice and peace, similar to what occurs when our earthly teachers return to their classes and meet out severe justice to bring order back into the classroom. The test for us is: What will the Lord find us doing upon his return? Doing what he asked of us? Doing his will, or our own?

This is Advent Sunday. The Advent season is about preparation in anticipation of the coming of Christ. We spiritually prepare ourselves for two Christmases, the historical Christmas of two thousand years ago, and the future Christmas when Christ returns.

This is the time when the church calls us to take stock of ourselves, to take inventory of ourselves, to determine if we are ready to meet Christ. Advent - a sacred time, God's time, a time to get ready for the return of the Light of the World. It is a time for listening to the prophets who tell us how far we have strayed from God's plan - and, yes, we all have strayed like lost sheep. We would do well to heed the prophets warning. They are telling us what is missing. Listen carefully to them!

Think about the time spent in preparation for this past Thanksgiving, or any holiday. Hours and hours can easily be spent in preparation for such holidays, which pass all too soon. Is there at least an equal amount of time spent in preparation for that which shall not pass, your eternal life? So, let's get off the train of materialism that rushes headlong towards December 25, and use our precious time reading the prophets and praying for the coming of Christ. Use wisely our precious time to make ready a place in our hearts and homes for that Child who will come once again, this time in great power and glory, this time as Lord and Judge.

The prophets were right; we must be ready. As our Gospel for this morning stated, "We do not know the hour," but we do know that time is getting short! He is coming! Are you ready, ready to literally meet our Lord, as George in our opening story is? Or will you be found just getting ready, found not prepared? Only you have the answer.