

Last Sunday of the Church Year  
November 24, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Live With Your Eyes on the Skies  
Mark 13:26-37 (EHV)

*Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.*

*<sup>28</sup>“Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors! <sup>30</sup>Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

*<sup>32</sup>“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. <sup>36</sup>If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup>What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

God made the human mind with amazing abilities. One of these is our ability to focus. We are able to concentrate on something with so much focus that we can block out distractions. This is how the basketball player steps up to the free throw line with a chance to win the game on the opponent’s court. The crowd is yelling and screaming and pounding on the bleachers. They are jumping around behind the basket, waving flags and signs and being as distracting as possible. But the player’s mind has been trained for this. The mind filters out the loud noise and the visual distractions, so the player is able to focus on the rim and calmly make the game winning shot.

Maybe you haven’t been in that situation. But have you ever been focusing on something so much that someone startled you? You didn’t hear them enter the room or see them until they tapped you on the shoulder and you jumped! Your mind was so focused on your book, your project, your word game, or whatever it was that you blocked out the rest of the world. Focus is a wonderful gift from God. Of course, since the fall into sin, the ability of our mind to focus has been corrupted and we often focus on the wrong things. On this last Sunday of the Church year, Jesus directs our focus to the skies to watch for his return. We keep our eyes on the skies because Jesus will return to give us all his words promise. We keep our eyes on the skies as we do our assigned tasks until Christ returns.

**We keep our eyes on the skies because Jesus will return to give us all his words promise.**

*Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.*

*<sup>28</sup>“Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors! <sup>30</sup>Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

In the early section of chapter 13, Jesus told the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem that would happen about 40 years after Christ's resurrection. He also told them about all the terrible things that would happen before Jesus returned on the Last Day. Wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of believers, false Christs and great distress. In the verse before us this morning Jesus tells us that "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen." When he says, "this generation" he is talking about the kind of people who hate God, hate Christ, and persecute believers. This kind of evil will continue until Jesus returns. Not very cheerful, is it?

Jesus is teaching us focus here. The distress and persecution and hatred of God and his Word and his Christ are distractions that must not take our focus from the words of Christ. The words of Christ will endure forever. I think of our brothers and sister in Christ in the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. Many of them have had their eyes on the skies for over 1,000 days, watching for bombs and missiles and drones to bring destruction and death. But the pastors and people have especially been focused on the words of Christ in these terrible times. Members and those who would have never stepped foot into a Lutheran church during peacetime gather around God's Word and Sacraments while literal bombs fall in their cities and towns. They focus on the promises of God fulfilled in Christ, that the Son of God took all their sins to the cross and paid for every sin. God is not punishing them with this war. Jesus has forgiven them. They gather to focus on the promises of Christ for them, that he is preparing a place in heaven, that he is watching over all things, that he will return to put an end to evil once and for all. They gather to be assured that on the day Jesus returns he will send his angels to gather them into heaven and those angels will not miss any whom God has chosen. And with one's focus on the enduring words of Christ, instead of a distraction, the war becomes a reminder that Jesus is really coming soon. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

For us who live in the relatively peaceful middle of the United States, the devil may use another distraction to take our focus off Christ's words and his return from the skies. We are not suffering under wars and rumors of wars. We don't suffer many earthquakes or famines here. We can get the idea that life on earth should always be good and getting better. Why look to the return of Christ when life is okay now? Complacency can set in. Why gather around God's Word when my life is going well? Why focus on the Last Day when I'm looking forward to so many great things on this earth? And our focus begins to wane from Christ and his Word.

When something terrible happens to interrupt our good life, we see it as just that, an interruption, a distraction. Our focus can be taken even more from Christ as we focus on whatever is wrong. We might even begin to blame God for ruining our life and bringing evil into our life when we've let our focus wander from Christ to our earthly life. Time to repent, refocus and see the problems in this life as signs that Jesus is going to return soon. Look at the evil of this world as the sprouting leaves of a tree in spring. This mindset is only one produced by focusing on the words of Christ because his words give and grow our faith and trust in him. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

### **We keep our eyes on the skies as we do our assigned tasks until Christ returns.**

We look forward to Christ's return, but we don't know when it will be. So, what do we do until that wonderful day? Jesus explains:

*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. <sup>36</sup>If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup>What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep*

*watch!*

We are all supposed to watch for Christ's return, but this does not mean we stop doing everything else in order to watch. It seems that some believers in Thessalonica had this misunderstanding. Paul writes much about the return of Christ to them, and they seem to think it would happen very soon and that if they were not watching, they might miss it. Perhaps some of them even stopped working so they could focus on Christ's return. This is not what Jesus is telling us by saying, "Keep watch."

We are the servants who are given assigned tasks while our master, Christ is away. Each believer has been assigned these tasks by God and we will have different tasks from the believers sitting near us this morning. Watching for Jesus' return does not mean every believer is to become a pastor, teacher, missionary and dedicate all their life to full time gospel ministry. The Bible calls this a noble desire but it is not for everyone.

A believer could give away all his money and possessions in order to get the gospel to more and more people before Christ returns. This could be a noble thing. But many of us have been given tasks by Christ that also use the wealth he entrusts to us by caring for family, paying taxes, helping the poor.

We could all move to the church property, have worship services many hours of every day and focus completely on the words of Christ all the time. But Christ has given us neighbors to serve, jobs to do, friends to encourage, and maybe even some time to enjoy this earthly life. We don't take ourselves out of the world in order to watch for Christ's return. We watch while we carry out what he puts before us each day, loving our God and our neighbor.

The key is to not get drawn into the tasks we have on earth so much that we forget to focus on the words of Christ and his return. But with our focus on Christ, we can enjoy time with friends and family. We can pursue excellence in our education and career. We can plan for our financial future. We can enjoy a good book, movie, concert, or game. When we trust that Jesus is coming back to gather all believers to himself forever, we can go about our given tasks each day with thanks and hope. Even on the days when the evil of sin interrupts our good life now, we have our eyes on the skies to know that Jesus will bring about a life for us that is beyond compare.

Amen.