

Watch

Luke 21:36

Sunday, December 1, 2024 The First Sunday of Advent

First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction: The Titanic had six watchmen on board and two of them, Frederick Fleet and Reginald Lee, were on duty on the fateful night. It was very dark and the water was so calm that it made it hard to discern where water stopped and air began. Though too late to completely avoid it, Fleet was the first to see the iceberg and ring the bridge with the message, "iceberg, right ahead." We all know what happened next. Both Fleet and Lee survived, but the crow's nest in which they did their work went down with the ship. In a sense, these two survivors symbolize a principle in the words of our Lord Jesus and elsewhere in Scriptures, that we are supposed to be awake and watchful. But this begs the question, "watch for what, and for how long?"

- Set the Stage: Jesus speaking at the end of Luke's Gospel

Toward the end of Luke's Gospel, the Lord Jesus turns His attention to things yet to come, the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and events that are yet to come. The world is an unstable place, with troubles, upheavals, wars and rumors of war all part of human history. Aside from predicting troubles at the end of the age, there are enough troubles in general to warrant His warning to watch and pray to be counted worthy to avoid those troubles (note the end of the Lord's Prayer, that ends with similar words.) and to stand before the Son of Man.

What does "stand" mean? The word can be literal or figurative and is often used in the sense of standing your ground. Ephesians 6:13 talks, after the passage about The Armor of Christ, about preparing and praying in such a way that a person is ready and will stand his/her ground when trouble comes, much of it being steadfast prayer for others. Much like the metaphorical house built on the rock. Such a person abides, perseveres, holds up under trouble and pressure, and in this passage, is found faithful by Christ and thus stands on the day of his judgment

Luke 12:37 Jesus serves us

One of the most beautiful visions of what it means to stand in life is found in Luke 12:37, in which Jesus tells how He will welcome those who stand. The passage says that Jesus, who washed the feet of His disciples, will throw a banquet for His followers and will wait on them Himself. I don't know how He is going to manage waiting on so many people, but can you imagine it. Try to visualize it, for it will remain with you when it is hard to stand.

- Application: Watch

The application is to watch. Literally to "not be asleep." There is an uncertainty to the Christian life in which we are expected to plan for the future, but live each day as if we were going to meet Christ face to face by suppers time. Mark's Gospel puts it this way: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray for you do not know when the time is." (Mark 13:32-33) This warning echoes throughout the Scripture. Be alert, be quick to pray, to pray for each other, to know what is going on around you, to be aware of your own emotional and spiritual state, to be in a state of expectation and is enshrined in the Christmas season. It is the season of seeing what we waited for. Christmas is when promises centuries old came to pass. Its message to us is "watch."

I looked up "how to be more observant.

I'm not a very observant person by nature. I can focus on something or someone well enough, but I'm not good at picking up details or being very observant. So much so that I decided to look it up on the internet. This is what I found.

"To be more observant, you can: minimize distractions, actively engage your senses, slow down your pace, ask questions about your surroundings, play observation games, keep a journal to record details, and intentionally focus on specific aspects of your environment; essentially, training yourself to actively notice details rather than passively taking in information. *"

I was struck by the suggestion to keep a journal, something that I used to do and am going to start again. Perhaps make my journal a sort of "end of the day report" to Jesus as part of my preparation to meet him face to face. I'll reflect on my spiritual and moral state, what happened during the day, what did I remember or notice (sometimes more than I thought at the time), who was hurting around me and what did I do to help. What was the content of my prayers, and what did I ask.

- Conclusion

Maybe this will help strengthen the habit that is the theme of the season, to watch, pay attention, be awake. Awake to Christ, awake to the state of the world, awake to each other. Be awake.

* <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-l-d&q=how+to+be+observant>