

Sermon: *Oh, You'd Better Watch Out!*
Text: *Mark 13:33 – 37*
Date: *November 27, 2011 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Last year, about this time, there was an article in *USA Today* about a Nativity Scene in Bal Harbor, Florida. It seems police had a problem on their hands ... the Baby Jesus had been stolen from the manger ... not once, not twice, but three times and the third time, it was bolted down, but the thieves took it anyway. So they installed a GPS in the Nativity, just in case there was a fourth time.

Every year, about this time, as I'm walking through the stores or driving through town, I get that same sinking feeling inside ... "*Somebody has stolen Christmas.*" Our culture has taken a Christian holy day and made it a very secular celebration, with a focus that our parents and grandparents in the faith wouldn't recognize.

In the 4th Century, December 25th was set aside as the date to commemorate the birth of Jesus and a 40 day season was set aside as a time of preparation for the church's high and holy celebration. And the church called this season, "*Advent,*" which means "*coming.*" And for the last 1700 years, the church has celebrated Advent and Christmas. We celebrate with trees and garlands and bows, with lights and candles, with colors and symbols, with scriptures and music.

While most Christians can't imagine Christmas without "*Silent Night,*" or "*O Come, All Ye Faithful,*" the most requested Christmas song in our culture is: "*Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer.*" So, since music is so important to our celebrations, I have chosen to

build my Advent Sermon Series around Christmas songs.

During the last week of His life, Jesus and the disciples were leaving the Temple one day and the disciples said: “Jesus, just look at these magnificent buildings.” And Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, the day is coming when you will not be able to find one stone on top of another in this place.” And when the disciples heard this, they naturally assumed the end of the world was at hand. And they asked Him, “When will these things happen and what signs can we look for to warn us?” And Jesus said: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned tasks, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I saw to you, I saw to everyone, ‘Watch!’”

When I read our scripture, several thoughts came to mind. **FIRST, THE GREAT AFFIRMATION OF ADVENT IS: JESUS IS COMING AGAIN!** That’s what He promised; He said: “I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will surely come again.” The angels, God’s messengers, re-enforced Jesus’ promise: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here, gazing up into the sky? This same Jesus

that you have seen taken from you will return just like He went away.

And so, as we prepare to celebrate His first coming as Bethlehem's Babe, we affirm our faith in Jesus who "ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and will come again to judge the quick and the dead." Verse 24 says: **"In those days ... the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavens will be shaken. Then, you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."** Jesus is coming again!

My second thought was about that old Christmas song. Maybe you could sing it with me ... "Oh you'd better watch out; you'd better not cry; you'd better not pout I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town. He's making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out who's naughty and nice, Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you're sleeping; he knows when you're awake; he knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake. Oh you'd better watch out; you'd better not cry; you'd better not pout I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town."

You see, Jesus gives us several insights into His coming. First, He tells us no one knows when it'll happen. Pat Robertson doesn't know; Billy Graham doesn't know; the Mayans didn't know; nobody knows! Verse 32 says: **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."**

In a Russian village, there lived an old Rabbi.

Every morning, the Rabbi would rise from his bed and cross through the town square on his way to the synagogue to pray. One morning, a soldier stopped him and said, "*Hey Rabbi, where are you going?*" The Rabbi said: "*I don't know.*" He said: "*What do you mean, you don't know? Every morning for 25 years, you have crossed this square on your way to the synagogue. Now, come with me.*" And he grabbed the Rabbi and threw him in jail. And just as the soldier turned to leave, the Rabbi said: "*See, I told you I didn't know.*"

That's the only thing we can say when someone asks: "*When is Jesus coming back?*" I don't know! No one knows the day or the hour of His coming!

But Jesus gave us another insight into His coming: We need to be ready! In Mark 13, the phrase "*Watch out*" or "*Be alert*" appears six times in these 37 verses. That tells me where Jesus places the emphasis. The church is asking the wrong question. Like the disciples, we want to know "*When is it gonna happen?*" when we should be asking, "*What must I do to be ready for His coming?*"

In order to be ready we must wait patiently. Jesus said there would be false messiahs, wars and rumors of war, and earthquakes and famines in various places but "*These are just the beginning of birth pains.*" It disturbs me that every time there's a national disaster or an acorn falls from the tree, somebody starts yelling, "*The sky is falling. The sky is falling.*" The truth is Jesus' comments have been applied to every generation from His time until ours. The last days began when He ascended and the only

thing we can say today is that we are one day closer today than we were yesterday. Wait patiently!

In order to be ready, we must watch prayerfully! Verse 5 says, "Watch carefully." Verse 9 says: "Be on guard." Verse 33 says: "Be alert." Jesus' message seems to be that His return is something we should look for. Our role is not a passive one; we are to be actively watching for His return. And woe to us if He returns and finds us sleeping on duty. Jesus said: "Do not let Him return and find you sleeping." Watch prayerfully!

In order to be ready, we must work productively! Verse 34 says: "It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned tasks." What's He saying? He's saying that you and I have been entrusted with His Kingdom. We are stewards of His Kingdom and each of us has a task to perform in order to expand it! Some are teachers; some are preachers; some are leaders; and some are quiet servants, but we all have a job to do. And the promise of His return should give each of us a sense of urgency about our calling. Since Jesus is coming back, we want everyone to be ready to meet Him. We don't want to enter the Kingdom without those that we love. So, we can't give up; we've got to keep sharing the Good News and inviting others to experience the grace of God.

John Wesley was working in his garden one day when a neighbor came by for a visit. He asked John, "*Mr. Wesley, what would you be doing right now if you knew Jesus was returning today?*" Wesley thought a

moment and said: *“I would go right on doing what I’m doing. I’d finish my garden, have some tea, go visit Mrs. Johnson, preach at the New Room, and then, go to bed a very tired man and wait for my Lord.”* Work productively!

Now, here is what I’ve discovered: there are basically two responses to the Second Coming. Some look at His return like the teenage boy who was told, *“Just wait till your daddy gets home.”* And others look at His return like a young girl, waiting for Santa on Christmas morning. Some are eager; some are subdued. Some are hopeful and some pessimistic. And how prepared we are for His coming makes all the difference in the world.

Are we ready for His coming? Are the lamps filled with oil, trimmed, and burning? Are we living lives worthy of our calling in Christ? My friend ... behold the Bridegroom is coming! Are we ready?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!