

Mark 13:24-37

December 2, 2018

First Sunday in Advent

Finding the Eternal (in a Finite World)

Scripture Reading -

Mark 13: 24 - 37

24 "In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then - they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 He will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

28 "From the fig tree - learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth leaves, you know summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

32 "But - about that day or hour no - one - knows! ..Neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like (you are) going on a journey, and leave home and put your workers in charge, each with their work, and command the doorkeeper to be on watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come: in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 What I say to you I say to all..is: Keep awake!"

Show of hands: how many of you know what 'pogs' are?

How about "pet rocks"? That will 'time stamp' your age! :) They've all...come - - and gone.

Oh and - - here you go, Fidget spinners.

You've heard of them, right? They were one of the hottest toys of 2017.

A fidget spinner is a small device with paddle-shaped blades attached to a central core. When you squeeze the core and give the blades a flick, they begin to spin. Because they are colorful and inexpensive, just a few dollars apiece, many children have **many** of them.

And ...these toys have generated controversy -- some schools ban them as a distraction.But - over time, (we know this; right?), over time the fidget

fad will fade and such spinners will gather dust ...along with hula hoops, troll dolls, Beanie Babies, and jelly bracelets. Not that fads are limited to children. Adults are equally susceptible to fads. Two words: pet rocks. J

Over a six-month period in the mid-70s, one and a half million pet rocks were sold! (Out of 200 million Americans then!) These smooth stones were sold in cardboard boxes... with a nest of straw ...and breathing holes. :) *They were rocks!* And sane, normal people -- teachers, lawyers, stock brokers -- went to work, and tended a pet rock on their desk. (*tilt head/eyes awry*)

More recently, these fads have also come ...and most have gone: Razor Scooters, Livestrong wristbands, WWJD bracelets, Heelys, speed dating, cupcake stores, "Angry Birds," Cronuts, "Duck Dynasty," Fifty Shades of Grey, planking, Tebowing, Furby, and the "Macarena." All of these ...were fads.

The Dictionary definition of fad is: "An intense but short-lived fashion; a cultural craze; a temporary notion..or manner of conduct, especially one followed enthusiastically by a group."

And - we too, children of the Word, find fads...fascinating.

There are...actually...fads connected to the Bible. *They tend to be focused..* on passages describing the return of Christ. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus says "the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory" (vv. 25-26).

Keep your eyes open, says scripture. "When you see these things taking place, you know ...He.. is near" (v. 29). These... apocalyptic passages of Scripture -- Daniel, Revelation, ..some of Jesus' words -- have been seized by some naysayers... in an almost faddish fashion.

~ Such is church history: the Anabaptists of 1530s Germany. The Millerites of the 1840s who took to the mountains by the thousands to await the return of Christ. The frenzy in the early 70s with the publication of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. The poor souls of Jonestown, Guyana. The Branch Davidians of 1993. The *Left Behind* books and movies.Y2K.

..*This list only scratches the surface* of apocalyptic fever. It rages like forest fire... through human history over the millennia. More recently -- seven years ago!-- the "end times" and return of Christ caught the world's attention: A radio preacher named Harold Camping studied scripture and came to the conclusion the world would end **May 21, 2011**. After sharing his prediction with his listeners, he used millions of dollars from their donations (have you noticed? Fear sells.) : to put his message on 5,000 billboards. (Did you see some..around here? I did...in California.) Camping estimated 7 billion people would die ..that day.

Then....May 21 came ..and went... with no return of Christ. Camping's followers expressed astonishment. Disappointment even. Some denounced him as a false prophet. But... ~ ~ ...he amended.. the date to October 21, and the world still didn't end. In the end it -- didn't really matter -- the fad, the fever, ...subsided.

He should have read verse 32, Jesus words: "But about that day or hour - no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, Nor do I know. Only God in Heaven knows."

~Fads come and go, for fidgets ..or prophecies. The truth is, nothing endures. Jesus himself said absolutely everything will pass away,including "heaven and earth" (v. 31).

The question for us then...is: What, will not fade and disappear? For, 'tis true, Everything will come and go.

Except -- except-- the word of God.

Jesus says here, "My words will not pass away" (v. 31).

In an ever changing world....the word of the Lord is our foundation forever.

So we need "keep awake -- for we know not when the master of the house will come." Verse 35.

~ Beloved - - faithful: our challenge is to forget fads ...and focus on the Foundation.

As we enter Advent, let's build our lives on something more substantive ...than a pet rock.

>> In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers ..*such words*...foundational for faith. Mark's Gospel does not include these lessons. But ~ Matthew does.

On his way around Galilee Jesus leaves us with these, Eternal nuggets: "Do not resist an evildoer ... give your cloak ... go also the second mile ... give.. to everyone who begs from you ... love your enemies. Pray ...for those who persecute you" (5:39-44).

Those truths...are **Eternal**. ...Difficult to hear....maybe. More difficult to follow. **But Eternal!**

No wonder Jesus begins His words, these...eternal words...saying, "You have heard it said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth'" (v. 38)

That gets attention.

But the...Living Word, the **Rock** that is our Foundation forever... points to this reality: God "makes the sun rise ...on the eviland on the good" (v. 45).

In this reality, in God's realm... everyone, everyone... evil and good, righteous and unrighteous, is born.. a child of God. God loves all children ...and provides for them, saints...and sinners.

Our mission as Christians, is to not follow fads that lift some people up and bring others down. Instead, we are to love others.. as God loves them, seeing God's image - in people who may look very ..ungodly. Three points...then we're done:

- i. Drifting into sarcasm, Jesus asks, "If you love those who love you, what good will it do you? Even corrupt politicians do that!" v. 46!

In other words, if you only love your friends and family, people who love you anyway, what have you accomplished on earth? Anyone... can do that.

- ii. When He says, "Don't resist an evildoer," He's not being soft on evildoers. He's teaching.. resistance - can escalate violence. Nelson Mandela took this approach in South Africa. "If you want to make peace with your enemy," he said, "you have to work with your enemy. Only thenwill he become your partner."

- iii. "Give your cloak," says Jesus. "Go ...the second mile" (vv. 40-41). Show your neighbors you love them so much you will literally give them the coat off your back. ...Demonstrate - - you are seeing God so clearly in others.. that you will walk a second mile with them. And seventh mile.

Jesus words.....

God's **Word**....is not a fad.

It is fundamental.

It may not always be easy,
but it is the key to following the Words - that last - forever.

Welcome to Advent, Beloved...

....listen...for the Living Word...is still speaking.

Amen.