

I'm quite certain that Thanksgiving Day will not come upon you unexpectedly. Nor will Christmas Day. You have these days marked on your calendar. If your turkey is still in the freezer on Thursday morning, and the ingredients for your pumpkin pie are still at the grocery store, and if Christmas Day arrives and you still have not purchased any Christmas presents, well, it's not because these days came suddenly and you were caught off guard. It's because you put off preparing for these days until it was too late.

So then, do you have marked on your calendar, perhaps even in red, the day of our Lord's coming? Because compared to Thanksgiving and Christmas, the day of our Lord's coming is far more important. And since we put these lesser days on our calendar, we surely will put His day there.

"But," you say, "Jesus says here in our text that no one knows that day. Only the Heavenly Father knows. We would have it on our calendars – the year, the month, and the day, and yes, in red, except that we don't know when it will come." Ah yes, that is a problem, isn't it? How are we expected to prepare for that day when we have no idea when it will come?

Now why don't we let this play out a little bit. Let's say we do know. We know the year, the month, and the day of our Lord's coming. And so, that day is marked well on our calendar. Would that be helpful so that we would be prepared when it comes?

Nothing could be worse. The temptation would be too great for us to put off preparing until closer to the day of our Lord's coming. And were we to die suddenly, we would be unprepared to meet our Lord. We would be like the five foolish virgins with no oil for their lamps.

No, God in His wisdom has not revealed the end of days to us. All He tells us is that it will come suddenly, and that we must always be prepared by staying awake.

But that's not easy. In fact, in the very next chapter of Mark's Gospel, when Jesus tells His disciples in Gethsemane to stay awake, He comes back from praying and finds them asleep. Three times! But they were tired, just as we get tired. And not just toward bedtime. We get tired of waiting and watching for our Lord's coming. I often fall asleep while praying in bed at night. Maybe you do, too.

How does Jesus expect us to stay awake? Four times in these verses He says to stay awake. Four times! Yet we are no different from His disciples in Gethsemane. They slept, we sleep. They grew tired of waiting and watching, and so do we. So, what is a Christian supposed to do?

First of all, repent. Admit the fact that we are both weak and sinful; that we do not stay awake and watchful as we should. And even this: that sometimes that doesn't bother us. We become so engrossed in our daily life that we take our eyes completely off the day of His coming. And we don't suddenly panic and say to ourselves: "Oh no! I forgot to stay awake!" No we don't. We think we're prepared because we had our catechism open decades ago for a little while. We know all that. We learned it. We're good. We haven't checked our oil supply for our lamps in a long time, but hey, there must be enough oil there somewhere, right?

Repent. Being prepared, staying awake means to live a life of repentance. Not just repenting when we think it's close to the end. A life of repentance. Daily confessing that we are weak sinners who have failed to stay awake as Jesus warns us.

And then this: marking on our calendars the days, not the day, but the days of our Lord's coming. Jesus comes each and every Sunday morning to where His Christians gather around His Word and Sacraments. Because here is the honest truth: when these days are marked well on our calendar, we will not need to have the day of His final coming marked. We will be prepared for it. We will be watchful and fully awake. Because the same Jesus who comes to us now is He who will come at the end of days. And friend, He comes now to prepare us for the end, whether the end is, for us, the day of our death or the day He comes in glory.

So then, obviously you and I are unable to mark, and even with red, that last, final day. But your Heavenly Father has that day marked. And for Him, that day is marked in red, red with the blood of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Because that day is the day that our redemption is drawing near; when He who shed His blood for us, and for all sinners on the cross, will come to take His Bride home.

Will He come to take you home? Do not beat yourself up if this question enters into your mind now and then. Being the weak sinners that we are, we do deal with doubt and uncertainty. "*Lord, I believe,*" we pray, "*help my unbelief.*"

Doubts can come, and do come, because of the sins we have done. "Will Jesus still take me to heaven? Me, a poor sinner who has done horrible things? I have fooled other people, but I cannot fool my God. He knows my past. He knows well how wretched I am. And I have not stayed fully awake as Jesus warns me. I have slept so much, slept spiritually. When that final day comes, will Jesus take me to heaven, or will He cast me away from His presence?" My friends, you would be surprised to know how many Christians, yes church members, have expressed these very concerns to me over the years.

Your assurance is in being marked with the blood of Jesus. The day of His coming is so marked, yes. But more, you are marked with His blood. You are covered with it. This is Jesus' promise to you in your baptism. You are washed clean of your sin by His blood. All your sin, all those horrible things in your past, they are all forgiven.

You can take your calendar and you can mark every day in red. Because every day of your life God sees the blood of Jesus marking you as one for whom Christ suffered and died on the cross.

One of those calendar days will be the day, the day that He will come in the end. So, go ahead and mark them all in red. It doesn't matter what day He comes. You are forgiven today, covered by Jesus' blood in your baptism. And you are forgiven also on that final day because your baptism is forever. And here's why: "*Heaven and earth will pass away,*" He says here, "*but My words will not pass away.*" Your baptism is Jesus' promise, His word of forgiveness to you. And His words will never pass away.

When someone is asleep, fully asleep, a good way to wake them up is to splash them with water. Remember your baptism into Christ every day. Let that water splash you in the face every morning and evening. It will keep you from sleeping. It will keep you alert and prepared for the Day of your Lord. Amen.