

## Mark 13:24-37

I remember being surprised, as a little boy, to learn that there was a game which could be played using dominos. You played them face up and matched the numbered dots. For some time I had thought that dominos were only for lining up to be knocked down. It was a game in itself. See who could make the longest chain. If they were set up correctly so that they would knock the next one over with no mistakes, there was always exuberance when the last domino fell.

In a certain sense, all of us in the church are involved in a game of dominos. It's spelled out for us in the Apostles' Creed, the Second Article. The first domino to be tipped over was when our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The next domino to fall was His birth of the Virgin Mary. Our Creed tells us the next domino: "*He suffered under Pontius Pilate.*" Because that domino fell, the next one had to fall, He "*was crucified.*" And the next, He "*died.*" And the next, He "*was buried.*" Do you see the chain of dominos falling over? Because God set them up correctly, each one would fall in their exact order. "*He descended into hell...the third day He rose again from the dead...He ascended into heaven...and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*"

Every one of these dominos has fallen. The chain began with the conception of our Lord in the womb of Mary. But really it began long before that when God promised our first parents that the Savior would come. The devil tried time and again to put a stop to these falling dominos. He tried to prevent each of the falling dominos from tipping over the next one in the chain. He used the enemies of Christ--the Scribes and Pharisees. He used the friends of Christ--Peter, for one, to hinder our Lord from taking the next step. But Satan was unsuccessful. God had arranged the domino chain too well. Nothing, not even the gates of hell, could stop it. Jesus was born, He suffered, He died, He rose again, He ascended, and now He sits at God's right hand.

Now one might think that the chain is over. From Jesus' conception to His ascension into heaven only thirty-four years went by. But it has been nearly 2,000 years since that last domino fell--since His ascension. Has Satan finally succeeded? Has he stopped the chain? That's what he would have us believe...that there are no more dominos to fall...that this is it, this world is where it's at. And so live for the present. Shop, hunt, party, work as if there was no tomorrow. Do not set your sights on another world to come. This world has plenty to offer. Do not get caught up with all the religious fanatics who carry their signs with the words: "The end is near!" Think not of the future, but of the present. All this is what Satan would have us believe.

But our Creed reminds us, because Jesus says so, that the last domino has not yet fallen. "*He will come,*" it clearly states, "*To judge the living and the dead.*" This last domino has not fallen yet, but it will. It must, because it is the last one in the chain. Not one of the dominos has failed to tip over. Each one was knocked down in order. God has not failed yet, and He never will. Christ shall return. The last domino will fall. It will fall with a mighty crash. The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from their high places. All the powers in the heavens will be shaken when the last domino falls.

And friends, here is the thing...we have no clue, no idea where that domino is. Is it tipped over a little? Is it half-way over? Or is it mere moments from hitting the floor? We don't know. But we do know that it is falling. And when it does, when it smacks the floor all hell will break loose. Literally, the terrors of hell will fall upon most of the people of this earth. At that moment when the last domino falls, it will be clear to them that life was not a game. Many will groan with uncontrollable sorrow for they, while living here on earth, did not make time for the Word of God. They did not listen when

Jesus' preachers preached. They lived for the present, not for the Lord. They did not stay awake. They slept as the last domino was falling. They were not wise enough to see that all the other dominos had already fallen, and that the Judge of the living and the dead would return. Rather, they were foolish virgins. Their lamps had run out of oil. They were people of the world more than they were people of the church.

So that you and I do not groan with them when Christ returns, He bids us, with all urgency, to stay awake. This is not the time for us to deny the fact that in the past we have slept. We need to admit that we have not been as watchful as we could have been. We have let down our guard. Not one of us has been in the Word of God enough, and without God's Word in our daily life we will become drowsy. We cannot stay awake on our own. Only God's Spirit keeps us awake and watchful, and the Spirit only works through the hearing and study of the Word. Today, on this Last Sunday of the Church Year, is a very good time to resolve with the help of God, and by His grace, to be people of the Word more than people of the world. With God's help resolve to be in His House with listening ears more than in the past. Resolve to rise a little earlier on Sunday mornings and with your family be in Bible Class and Sunday School. Resolve to be in the Word daily...and there are devotional books that are second to none available for you, and on sale, in the lobby.

The Old Adam in each of us wants no part of this. He stubbornly resists all efforts by God to draw us closer to our Lord. But friend, you are baptized in Christ. You also have the New Man within you. Through Christ you can do all things. Through Him you can become ever stronger in the Word so that you will always be awake, and watchful, and prepared for the last domino to fall. So that when it falls, you will shout with exuberance, you will rejoice as the angels gather you up to meet the Lord. For you see, even though you and I do not know when the last domino will fall, we do know who is coming when it falls--the Judge of the living and the dead, who was judged guilty in your place, who was crucified for you, who died to give you life, who rose again so that in your baptism He comes to live in you, so that in Holy Communion He comes to nourish you and strengthen you.

You do not know when, but you do know Who. He will come, who taught you to pray, "*Forgive us our trespasses.*" And He taught you these words because He loves to forgive. He will come, who calls Himself the Good Shepherd, and you His beloved sheep. He will come, who promises, "*I go to prepare a place for you*" He will come who became sin for you so that by His death on the cross, you who love Him now, will love Him when He returns to take you home. Have you been as watchful as you should have been? No. Friend, He will help you. He forgives your drowsiness. He forgives your unpreparedness. He forgives you. And He will, through His strong Word, keep you faithful, and watchful, and awake so that you will shout with all joy when the last domino falls. Amen.