

“Are You Alert?” – November 26, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Credo in unum Deum

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St. Mark 13:24-37

You may know that Julian of Norwich was the first woman to write a book in the English language. This church Mother lived in the fourteenth century in a tiny cell built into the side of the church in Norwich, England. The cell has a small window by which Julian could watch and listen to the worship services. In early 1374 she became critically ill and, certain she was going to die, she called the priest to her side.

When a cross was shown to her, she experienced a sequence of night visions that she wrote about following her illness. Julian’s book, *“Revelations of Divine Love,”* is a classic in spiritual direction and discipleship.

Throughout her years of seclusion, she read and heard many Scripture passages, including today’s Gospel lesson. Here Jesus cautions his followers to be ready, *“because the day of the Lord is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.”* (13:34).

Julian envisioned Jesus with his followers as servants. She wrote: *“Mine understanding was lifted up into Heaven where I saw our Lord as a lord in his own house, which hath called all his dear worthy servants and friends to a stately feast. Then I saw the Lord take no place in His own house, but I saw Him royally reign in His house, fulfilling it with joy and mirth, Himself endlessly to gladden and to solace His dear worthy friends, full homely and full courteously, with marvelous melody of endless love, in His own fair blessed Countenance.”*

Julian recognized that Jesus as Master would come back, but his coming was nothing to be afraid of. She knew this because she saw Jesus move in the Holy

Scriptures as a loving, kind, gentle and patient Master. She knew the wonder and reverence in Jesus' presence, that he is a friend and a sanctuary.

There has been far too much fiction, movies, and sermons that "explain" exactly how, when, and where the Parousia, the second coming of Jesus, will occur.

The result has been an interest, yes, in the subject but it is riven with fear and nervousness. Sometimes, I think the core idea of the authors, producers, and preachers, is to terrify believers and unbeliever equally.

American culture being what it is, perhaps it requires the endless, 24/7 news, and social-media, for us to look up. Do we really require all of the bells and whistles for our attention to be re-focused?

All through human history there has been fighting and suffering, but the knowledge of God's return in Jesus Christ has brought patience, joy, hope and persistence. We find it here in St. Mark chapter 13 but also in the books of Zechariah, Daniel, and the Revelation. It is there because the theme of apocalyptic literature is a call to endurance. An invitation to hold on, to 'keep the faith, baby!'

Although enormous things are promised and majestic experiences will happen, we the "Followers of the Way," God's servants who, in this in-between time, are commanded to continue doing Jesus' ministry.

This thirteenth chapter of St. Mark is sometimes entitled the "Little Apocalypse," but this is inaccurate. There is nothing 'little' about it. This is galactic! The heavens are blackened, as stars fall from the sky, Jesus is disclosed in all of his glory while angels fly rescue missions gathering the faithful. Jesus has quite the paint brush and pallet!

It is understandable why Jesus asks his followers to stay awake. Staying awake however, does not mean 'marching in place,' waiting for Jesus. There is no better model for this than our Master himself. How he longs to get away from the noise, people, and pressure, so that he may pray and meditate with God the Father.

But, Jesus seeing the hungry people, eager for both God's word and daily bread, and is consumed with intense compassion.

When some people attempt to 'protect' Jesus from "wasting" his time with the children, women, the lame and the blind, Jesus gathers, heals, and speaks. And, at what we call the Last Supper, Jesus washes the Disciples' feet, an action required of slaves.

Clearly, the penultimate example of service is the cross. Please note that his was not some 'spur-of-the-moment' plan. A short perusal of the Holy Scriptures and the literature of the times, will clarify that the expected Messiah would not be a military conqueror but a suffering servant. For example, there is a three-foot-high stone tablet called, "Gabriel's Revelation" written in the time of Jesus. It speaks of a messiah, Ephraim, son of Joseph, who will redeem God's people by suffering, death and resurrection.

We are one week from the beginning of the Season of Advent, a season of waiting. We anticipate the newborn King to whom we sing carols, give gifts, and feast with family and friends. But we do not have to wait until next week. We can decide to visit someone in need, or write that card or letter. We might increase our support of the food bank. Or, we might just wait on God to tell us what to do.

Julian of Norwich did hit the nail on the head: Jesus delights in those who serve; and those who serve will be filled with joy. Will we remain alert as Jesus asks? Today's parable of the master and his servants shows us that there is still work to be done. Alleluia. Amen.