

ADVENT 1: WATCH!

Mark 13:33-37 [MW17-37]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 03 December 2017

Anyone watch those American investigative dramas on TV?

- CSI, NCIS, Law and Order, detective series, that sort of thing???
- ever heard the term "BOLO"? B-O-L-O?
- as in "put a BOLO on that car", "put out a BOLO on this person"
- BOLO?
- Be On Look Out: B-O-L-O
- Be On Look Out for ...

That's what's happening today

- the reading from Marks' Gospel is like putting out a "BOLO"
- this is Mark 13:33
- CEV *Watch out and be ready.*
- NIV *Be aware. Keep alert.*
- NRSV *Be on guard. Be alert.*
- NL *Be on guard. Stay Alert.*
- TM *Keep a sharp lookout.*

[Pick up binoculars]

These might help – but you still need to know where to look ...

- like when you hear a plane in the sky
- you look where the sound is coming from and ... nothing
- then you look further ahead, because light is faster than sound
- like seeing lightning before hearing the thunder
- so we are to be on look out for what? for who?

Jesus!

Jesus came the first time and though all the signs were there

- most people missed it
- then when people got around to noticing him
- even then they missed him
- because they said he couldn't possibly be who he said he was!
- and who was he?
- Son of God, Saviour, Messiah ...

Jesus promised he would come again

- we don't know when
- so as Mark writes in his gospel
- it's best to be ready ... whenever
- where is he coming?
- how is he coming?
- when is he coming
- we can't exactly say, but judging from last time – the first time
- it won't be what is expected and it will be amazing

However, however

- in the meantime as we wait for that we are not just to sit around
- we have our mission to be going on with ...

Our mission of sharing the Good News of God with us

- our mission of sharing God's love and grace and welcome
by what we do and say
how we live
how we relate to everyone
- the “everyones” Jesus called our neighbour

This, the first Sunday of Advent reminds us to, calls us to:

- Be On Look Out
for the signs of God with us in our midst
because they are there
- we just need to respond to the BOLO

So I encourage you ...

- Be On Look Out for the signs of God with us all around
Be On Look Out for opportunities to share this Good News
Be On Look Out for the new thing God is doing in your life this Christmas!

Watch! Be on look out ...

- I came across something that might help us in our “watching” and “looking out”
William J. Bausch writes:

Maybe Jesus is not referring to his sudden coming next week or next year, but to his coming right now, his presence here – today – quietly seeding love and slowly pushing back the darkness. Maybe that is what we should be watching for. Maybe we should look past the daily horrors to those people who give us a hint of his daily presence, who give us hope, encouragement, and challenge.

People like Ron ...

A man named Ron recalls that when he was growing up, his mother, a nurse, had a real thing about cleanliness. From an early age Ron was taught that when he went through a push door to shove it open with his fist. If the door had a handle, he was to pull it open with his little finger. If he did as his mother instructed, he would not get germs on his hands. Ron never forgot his mother's teaching. “At age forty-eight,” he says, “I probably had the strongest little finger in America”

Well, one day Ron was serving a hot meal at a soup kitchen, chili with two pieces of buttered bread. A man came down the line who looked even more scruffy and broken than the others. Ron was overwhelmed by his stench. “Like a pull of a magnet,” Ron recalls, “my gaze went to the dirt and dried blood on his hands.” Then before he realized what was happening, the man clasped Ron's hands in both of his.

“Brother,” said the scruffy man, “I love you. Thanks for being here.”

“I'm glad you came,” Ron replied after swallowing hard, trying to smile as the man shuffled over to one of the tables with his meal.

The next man stepped up. As Ron handed him a bowl of chili, a little of the chili spilled on Ron's hand. Without thinking, he licked it off. Then it hit him. That was the hand the other man had just clasped! Ron momentarily froze, repelled to think that he had licked something that smelly old man had just touched. But it was also a moment of revelation for Ron. He said, “The light of awareness changed my vision. No longer was Jesus only the handsome man I had pictured in my mind and seen in paintings. Now he had a scarred, stubbled face and fingers stained yellow; he was dirty, he smelled bad, and he wore cast-off clothes. I had just served Jesus chili and bread.”

This is a true Advent of a man who was watching and so recognised the Lord here and now in the midst of poverty and uncleanliness.

And then there's this ...

The mother and small child were waiting at the airport. The mother had given the little girl a cup of orange juice and a cookie to keep her occupied. Suddenly someone bumped into the mother who in turn brushed the child and the juice slopped all over her, with the cookie crumbs all over her face and front. A woman who observed all this spotted the father who just got off the plane and was waving to his family. He was sharp and neat in his nice suit, shirt, and tie, carrying his briefcase. The woman thought, "No way is he going near that messy child. He'll stay his distance, peck his wife on the cheek, and take off."

Of course he didn't do any of that. He ran up to the messy child, held her against his white shirt, and whispered loving things in her ear. All the way to the luggage claim area, he never stopped hugging and kissing her, stroking her hair. Surely a reminder of God embracing the morally messy sinner. It is the Prodigal Son story in modern dress and so, once more, a hint of a Presence here and now.

Yes, there are terrible things going on in our world

- even in the season of 'peace and goodwill to all'
however people like Ron and that open-armed father
remind us that the hidden Lord is among us
- unsung, unannounced, unreported by the media
but here nevertheless
- be on look out for him: watch!

To conclude – an “Advent challenge”

- as well as being on look out, our encouragement, our calling
is to be signs of Jesus' presence that others can be on look out for
- our deeds of charity, our acts of forgiveness, our compassion, our morally lived lives
are pinpoints of light in a morally dark world
- Advent calls us to show a weary and anxious people that the Lord really has come
and if there is any watching to be done to detect Him
it is to watch us ...