

## Sermon for December 1, 2013

There are two elements in today's Gospel reading that stand out for me. The first is the unexpectedness of Jesus' return; not even Jesus himself knows when that will be; only the Father knows. But we know about the unexpected don't we. For most of our lives we live in unexpectedness; sometimes the unexpected is joyful, but more often than not—it isn't. Whether it's the breakup of a marriage, the loss of a job, a miscarriage or the death of a loved one—we don't know when or to whom it will happen. But when they do happen these things take us aback and threaten to destroy any semblance of order we think we've created for our lives.

So we try to protect ourselves by taking out health and life insurance, but also in other ways. We don't take our dream job for fear of failure. We don't enter into relationships for fear of pain and loss. We numb ourselves to the pain of others for fear that it might remind us of our own pain. Because we know that life is so unpredictable we also know that it is precious.

So take a look at your unpredictable and precious life. What is it that you most fear? As you ponder that I want to remind you of the second element of this passage—that of promise. Jesus promises in earlier verses of chapter 24 to collect his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other.

Jesus' promise to us doesn't mean that our lives will go smoothly or predictably, but it does mean that whatever comes our way—Jesus will go through it with us. He will be at our side giving us the strength to face the job loses, the break up of relationships, the miscarriages, the deaths of our loved

ones; whatever adversities come our way. He walks with us even through the valley of the shadow of death and brings us through to new life on the other side!

As we enter this Advent season and the daylight grows shorter and darkness seems to be taking over our world, we light Advent candles each week to remind ourselves that we do not face this darkness alone; that the light of the world has come shining into the darkness. This light illumines our lives and leads us forth with courage and even joy!

As you remember that One who said that he would never leave you nor forsake you, the One who said that he would be with us until the end of the age, the One who left his rightful place in heaven to become one of us, to live as we do and to die for us—what are you willing to risk? Are you willing to experience more deeply the healing presence of the One who came, who comes now and who will come again?

I want to end today with a prayer that I became familiar with during my internship year. This prayer has become one of my favorites; especially since during this the second half of my life I've been on a journey that I have no idea where or when it will end.

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love is supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.