

Cooma Anglican 3 December 2023 - Advent 1 - 1st Order APBA

Introduction

Advent Candle

Faithful God, whose promises stand unshaken through all generations, may this advent candle renew us in hope, that we may be on guard and alert, watching for the glorious return of Jesus Christ, our judge and saviour, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever,
Amen

Hymn TIS 264 Hark a Herald voice is calling

Hark! a herald voice is calling:
'Christ is near,' it seems to say,
'cast away the dreams of darkness,
Waken, children of the day!'

Wakened by the solemn warning
let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her sun, all sloth dispelling
shines upon the morning skies.

Lo, the Lamb so long expected
comes with pardon now from heav'n;
let us meet him with repentance,
pray that we may be forgiv'n.

So when love comes forth in judgement,
debts and doubts and wrongs to clear,
faithful may he find his servants
watching till the dawn appear.

Greeting

The Lord be with you. **And also with you .**

Sentence of the Day

Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Mark 13:31

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Lord, have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God

Give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Now in the time of this mortal life in which your son Jesus Christ came among us in great humility, that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, may we rise to the life immortal. Through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit One God, now and forever **Amen**

The Ministry of the Word

Isaiah 64.1-9

1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! 2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! 3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. 4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. 5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? 6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. 7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins. 8 Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9 Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!

**2 Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength,
And come and save us!**

3 Restore us, O God;
Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

**4 O LORD God of hosts, How long will You be angry
Against the prayer of Your people?**

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,
And given them tears to drink in great measure.

**6 You have made us a strife to our neighbors,
And our enemies laugh among themselves.**

7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

**17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.**

18 Then we will not turn back from You;
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

**19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!**

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (NIV)

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge — 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Mark 13:24-37

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

24 “But in those days, following that distress, “‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ 26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds,

from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. 28 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

This is the gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon Mark 13

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God forever.

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord’s Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Exhortation

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who would come to the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ must consider how St Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves before presuming to eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

For the benefit is great, if with a penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament. We then spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; we dwell in Christ and he in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us.

Yet also the danger is great if we receive the bread and cup unworthily. Judge yourselves therefore, that you be not judged of the Lord. Repent truly of your sins, having a steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour. Amend your lives and love your neighbour.

Above all, give hearty thanks to God for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, truly God and truly human, who humbled himself to death on the cross for us sinners, that he might make us children of God, and raise us to eternal life.

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to strengthen and comfort you. But first, let us make a humble confession of our sins to almighty God.

Confession

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we acknowledge with shame the sins we have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your divine majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us.

We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for all our misdoings. Have mercy on us, most merciful Father. For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, to the honour and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all who with hearty repentance and true faith turn to him: have mercy on you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the words of assurance for those who truly turn to Christ:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Hymn TIS 497 Let all mortal flesh keep silence

**Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.**

**King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth he stood,
Lord of Lords in human vesture,
In the body and the blood
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.**

**Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.**

**At his feet the six winged seraph;
Cherubim sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice the cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, Lord most high!"**

The Thanksgiving

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, Lord, Might Creator and Eternal God.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Glory to you, O Lord most high.**

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

All glory to you, our heavenly Father, for in your tender mercy you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death on the cross for our redemption: who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and instituted, and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again.

Hear us, merciful Father, we humbly pray, and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, according to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood; who on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' Amen.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

After Communion

Almighty and everliving God, we heartily thank you that you graciously feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus assure us of your favour and goodness towards us and that we are true members of the mystical body of your Son, the blessed company of all faithful people, and are also heirs, through hope, of your eternal kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son. And we humbly beseech you, heavenly Father, so to assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, world without end.

Hymn TIS 315 Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord

Verse 1

**Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
he has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:
his truth is marching on.**

Chorus 1

**Glory, glory, hallelujah,
glory, glory, hallelujah,
glory, glory, hallelujah,
his truth is marching on.**

Verse 2

**He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
he is sifting out the hearts of all before his judgement seat:**

O be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

Chorus 2

Glory, glory, hallelujah,
glory, glory, hallelujah,
glory, glory, hallelujah,
our God is marching on.

Verse 3

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in his bosom which transfigures you and me:
as he died to make us holy, let us live to make us free,
while God is marching on.

Verse 4

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave;
he is wisdom to the mighty; he is succour to the brave:
so the world shall be his foot-stool, and the soul of time his slave:
our God is marching on.

Notices

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Sermon

Introduction.

Do you ever listen to parliamentary question time? It happens every day when the parliament is sitting, and I used to hear it on the car radio on my way home from work. According to the Parliament House website, Question Time can be loud and fiery, with plenty of lively debate and interruptions. I think loud, fiery, lively debate is a bit of an understatement, and I particularly recall when one of our Christian brothers, John Anderson, was deputy Prime Minister. We attended the same church, and I knew him to be one of the most gentle and gracious people I have ever met. However, when I heard him in question time it was like he was a completely different person - he was loud, fiery, to say nothing of completely merciless when there were points to be scored at the opposition's expense, and he didn't often actually answer the opposition's questions.

One of the rules of question time is that you have to answer the question that was asked, although you would never guess this. While the question might be very specific, the answer almost always is about a very different point that either scores points for the party answering, or embarrasses whoever asked the question. In most cases, they might as well be answering a completely different question.

In our gospel reading this morning, Mark relates to us a situation where Jesus answered the apostles' questions. The problem is, the apostles asked two (or possibly 3 questions) at the same time, and Jesus isn't explicit which question he is answering when. He is not doing this like the politicians to score points against anyone, but I suspect the apostles, at their point in history, could not fully understand the answer, and so they just faithfully recorded the response for us to interpret for ourselves. We have an advantage in this, although not much, by where we stand in history, and particularly as we are on this side of the cross and other first century events, but theologians still debate which bits answer which questions, or even if the responses relate to the questions at all.

My apologies if my sermons appear to be fixated on the second coming, it just appears that the set readings for the last few weeks talk about it, so that's what I preach on, although I have been preaching about different aspects of it. In our passage this morning, Jesus finally seems to get to the question we all want to know the answer to: When will these things happen?

The Questions Jesus was asked

Before I get to the answer, though, I want to remind us of the questions that Jesus was asked that prompted him to answer as he does. Back at the beginning of Chapter 13, the disciples pointed out the massive stones in the magnificent temple, and Jesus replied: Mark 13:2 (NIV) *Do you see all these great buildings?" "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."* Later, on the Mount of Olives, Mark 13:3-4 (NIV) *Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"* You will notice that there are actually two questions - **'when will these things (the destruction of the temple) happen?'** and **'what will be the signs leading up to it?'**

And just to make it even more complicated, if you read the parallel section, in Matthew 24, the apostles also ask "what will be the sign of Jesus's coming?" which they appear to assume will happen at the last days, "when everything will be fulfilled". So we need to be careful as we read Jesus's response, and try to understand which question Jesus is answering at each point. I won't be the first to admit it isn't easy.

Anyway, our passage we read this morning actually starts in the middle of Jesus's answers to those questions. Our passage starts in verse 24 with the words "Following that distress," which should lead us to look at what Jesus has just been saying leading up to this passage so we can identify exactly what 'that distress' is.

The distress (verses 5-23)

If we look back to about Mark 13:6, it appears that Jesus is talking about the period leading up to the destruction of the Temple as the distress. We know the temple was destroyed in AD70 (or about 40 years, or what was considered one generation, after Jesus said these words), and it was done by pagan, emperor worshipping, idolatrous Romans.

Jesus said that leading up to the temple's destruction, there will be many false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, nations rising against nations, earthquakes and famines; Christians will be handed over to authorities and flogged. Family members will betray each other to death, children will rebel against their parents, and everyone will hate Christians because of Jesus, and the abomination that causes desolation will be where it doesn't belong. He says it will be particularly dreadful for pregnant women and nursing mothers, and there will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning of creation, and never equalled again. Historically we know that many of these things did happen before the temple was destroyed, although they all have also been happening ever since.

Also, the 'abomination that causes desolation' might sound a little strange to us. As far as I can tell, an abomination is a great sin, generally involving idolatry. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says this was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, who appears to be referring to the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who ruled Palestine from 175-64 B.C. He treated Israel with such violence and contempt that they rebelled against him. In suppressing the rebellion, his forces entered the temple, stopped the regular sacrifices, set up an idol on the altar for Zeus, and apparently offered pigs there as a sacrifice. We believe the Romans committed a similar defilement in the temple before completely destroying it in AD70.

Jesus also says in verse 10, that 'The gospel must be preached to all nations' as having to happen before the temple is destroyed. I must admit that this threw me, because I, like perhaps yourselves, thought there are still unreached nations that the gospel hasn't reached. How therefore could the gospel be preached to all nations before the destruction of the temple? Well, preaching to unreached nations is still going on, but the Bible says the gospel was preached to people of all nations, or as Acts 2:5 puts it, people of every nation under heaven on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, which was well before AD70. Paul also says in Romans 10:17-18 (NIV) *the message is heard through the word about Christ.*¹⁸ *But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the*

earth, their words to the ends of the world." So, the gospel had been preached, at least in part, to all nations prior to AD70.

All these events in this 'distress' don't sound like fun times, and Jesus knows this. It is why he warns his disciples to let the Holy Spirit speak through them when they are on trial, to flee from Judea to the mountains without going back to their houses for anything, and to pray that it doesn't happen in winter. Nevertheless, Jesus says that all these things will happen when the temple is destroyed, but he also promises that they would be shortened to let some survive.

Jesus' Return (V24-34)

In today's passage says that after 'the distress', there will be signs in the heavens, and Jesus will return in the clouds to bring about the judgement of the world of which I spoke last week. The signs in the heavens, "*the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving its light; 25 the stars falling from the sky, and the heavenly bodies shaken*" sounds a lot like Isaiah 13:9-11, which says: *See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.*¹⁰ *The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.*¹¹ *I (that is God) will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.* This is a pretty sobering image of God's judgement on the day of the Lord. We don't want to be judged by someone that turns off the stars, darkens the sun and the moon, and is full of wrath and fierce anger to boot! At the very least, I want to make sure I am on the right side of that judgement, as I discussed in the last couple of sermons.

When this will happen (verses 28-34)

Now, at this point, Jesus finally seems to get to the question we all want to know the answer to: When will this happen?

He tells us about this by giving a little parable about the coming of summer. He says, Mark 13:28-29 (NIV)²⁸ "*Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.*"²⁹ *Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.*

I actually have a fig tree in my front garden. The leaves fall off in autumn and winter to the extent I worry if it is still alive. In spring it flowers, and around now as we are coming into summer, the one or two figs it grew have either fallen off or been eaten by birds, and it is sprouting new branches and more leaves. Even if you are as bad, or an even worse gardener than me, you will understand the point of Jesus' parable. We are given signs that precede the coming seasons - new growth indicates summer, leaves fall in Autumn. After we see events like those preceding the destruction of the temple, we should be expecting Jesus to return.

In other words, when we see false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, nations rising against nations, earthquakes and famines; Christians being handed over to authorities and flogged, family members betraying each other to death, children rebelling against their parents, everyone hating Christians

because of Jesus, and the abomination that causes desolation, we should expect Jesus's return, and the judgement he brings to be just around the corner.

So, you might be thinking that all you have to do is wait for these things to happen, and then the second coming will pop its head around the door.

In one sense you are right, Jesus did say these things have to happen first, but when you think about it, these things have been happening throughout all of history, and at least since Jesus ascended to heaven. There were even false prophets since the book of Acts, and Paul and Peter spoke against some of them in their letters. There have been significant wars throughout recorded history, just like we currently have in Ukraine and Gaza. Major earthquakes statistically occur every one or two years, and don't get me started on children rebelling against their parents and people hating Christians - no one needs to tell us about them. We also don't need to wait very long before we hear about holy places being defiled and destroyed - abominations like those abound, even today.

So it's a bit like my dog, Jedda. Every mid afternoon, she starts whining at me to take her for a walk, no matter what the weather is like. The thing is, she's not a puppy anymore, and I don't think she even particularly likes to go for walks, particularly when the weather is miserable. However, she loves her food, and she thinks that an afternoon walk is a necessary precursor to getting fed her dinner. This is probably because when I was a public servant, I'd walk her when I got home and usually feed her straight after her walk. Now I'm at home most afternoons, I have convinced her that there might be a gap between getting home from her walk and dinner, but she still firmly believes the walk has to happen first.

Similarly, there has been a gap between the 'distress', or as Jesus is saying, the signs signifying the destruction of the temple, and Jesus returning. The signs have to happen first, as they have been doing, but as surely as we can see the signs, so we can be sure that Jesus will return.

This is what Jesus means by saying Mark 13:30-31 (NIV) this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. The signs all happened in Jesus's hearers' generation, (and are still happening) but the thing they point to, Jesus's return, is still to come.

The reality is that Jesus admits that the Day and Hour is Unknown. He, at least while on earth away from the Father's side, didn't even know when thru would happen. He says: 32 "**But about that day or hour no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

So, no one knows when Jesus will return. Also, don't be like some pedantic souls I know who claim that while they can't know the day or the hour, they do know the year and the month. They are clearly just misreading the text.

So, I'm sorry if you were expecting a concrete year and date when Jesus will return from this sermon. The honest fact is that God has not chosen to reveal it to us. If you look up Predictions and claims for the Second Coming, there are 45 specific dates that people have claimed Jesus will return

between 500AD and 2021 - the year before last. Unless I've missed it (which the Bible makes pretty clear that no one could), they all are wrong. That of course hasn't stopped people, Wikipedia also notes 5 dates in the future that people have predicted, from 2025 and 2060. Of course, any of those could be right (and some of them are pretty broad predictions), but I can assure you that the logic they use to come by their dates is inevitably wrong, because God has made it clear we cannot know.

We cannot know when the time will come, and as Jesus said, it is like God is a house owner who has gone away and left us in charge of the house, each of us with our assigned tasks. We are to keep watch because we do not know when the owner will return. Nevertheless, when he does, we must not let him find us sleeping, whether he returns in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows?

So what does this passage tell us about the second coming, since we can't know when it will happen?

We are told that everything that has to happen before the second coming have already happened - not only has Jesus gone away (he has ascended into heaven), all the signs of his return - the false Messiahs, the wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution and trials of Christians, family betrayals, the abomination that causes desolation, and even the gospel being preached to all nations, have already happened.

The passage tells us that it is more important how we live prior to the second coming than it is to know when it will happen. Jesus tells us to **33 Be on guard! Be alert! Do not let him find you sleeping.**

You will also remember what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5 last week: 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 (NIV) This day (that is Christ's return) should not surprise you like a thief... Let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet...¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

What Jesus says, I say to you, and I say to everyone: "Watch!"