

The title for today's message is: **Be on guard, be alert!**

Peter said: The day of the Lord will come like a thief.

Grace and Peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Our Gospel Lesson this morning deals with a subject that can frighten many, make many try to predict its coming and can catch many off guard, the subject is the second coming of Christ.

Christ says in Mark Chapter 13: ***"But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come."***

Be on guard, be alert! But many don't care about meeting Christ as seen in the following story: "The devil was planning to destroy the world.

He called in his chief assistants. Anger stepped in and said that he would set brother against brother.

Lust said that he would replace love and turn people into beasts. Greed advocated his passion for turning loose all the covetous cravings of the soul'.

Gluttony, Envy and Jealousy each had their audience with the devil as they presented their plans for destroying the world. The devil was not satisfied.

Finally the last one came in and said, 'I shall talk to people about what God wants them to be. I shall encourage them to follow the plans and purposes of God.'

The devil was aghast at such talk. But the little devil went on, "'However, I shall

Don't start until things are more favorable. The devil laughed and said, 'You are the one who shall go to earth and destroy it.

You shall be called Procrastination." Or another trick of the devil which is popular is to place high importance on our accomplishments as seen in the following story:

"Ted Williams, the baseball star, had a great day at the plate hitting two home runs and going four for four at bat. Besides his fielding that day was remarkable.

A young reporter came into the locker room and said, 'Mr. Williams, you did everything today but walk on water.'

With that Williams turned to the locker room attendant and said, 'Fill the shower, Today's the day!

We chuckle, we laugh, we smile at both stories, but seriously don't they have a lot of truth to them. Jesus saw that kind of attitude in his day.

As He and the disciples were in the temple, the disciples couldn't themselves at being in awe of the splendor of the temple.

As the accomplishments of those who built it gave to them a sense that the beauty and wonder of this temple would somehow save them.

The temple was to many Jews the Messiah, and in Jesus' eyes it was a false messiah so Jesus said: *"As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."*

Then Jesus warns them of other false messiahs, advises them to be prepared, to be ready for the coming of the real Messiah, and assures them he will always be with them.

Those same warning apply to us today. So in the next moments I would like to look closely at each warning as it applies to our lives.

First, false messiahs. One false messiah we have already seen in the story of Ted Williams, that being a false sense of pride in ones own accomplishments.

Our technologies, our wonder drugs, our star Wars defense systems, our own egos can be and sometimes are false messiahs.

Jesus warns the disciples about them, He says: "Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name saying I am he and the time is at hand! Do not go after them" But we do, don't we.

We are a people who are easily led astray by the latest fads, the comforts of our abundance, the power of our business community.

Now the false sense that somehow through the lotto, and or a horse race, we can become rich, and then life will be secure. False messiah, yes.

A poet said it well:" Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment; Trust in your friends, they will die and leave you;

Trust in money and you may have it taken from you; Trust in reputation and some slanderous tongue may blast it; But- Trust in God and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity.

The next warning was when Jesus speaks of God's time coming as He says: *"And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once."*

Jesus is saying that God's time is beginning but not in an expected way, maybe through a way of suffering and upheaval.

God is in control, God is breaking in, maybe not the way we expect it. Or maybe God might be saying," Look my people I have tried it your way, now it is my turn.

God's great love is like a long kite string. He lets us run out all our line, but still we cannot be content, so then God waits patiently for us to repent, to turn away from, false messiahs and, begin the process of preparing for His coming.

Jesus warns of an unexpected, coming. As we saw in that verse from Mark's gospel, 'no one knows when, but we must' be ready.

But how much are we like that little devil called Procrastination. We put it off. We feel we have plenty of time, we won't meet our maker now, but how do you or I know.

As Peter says in II Peter chapter 3: *"But do not forget one thing, my dear friends. There is no difference in the Lord's sight between one day and a thousand years, to him the two are the same."*

Are you prepared? What if Jesus came today, what if you died unexpectedly with no chance to ask for forgiveness and making a means for your life?

Are you as ready now as you will ever be? Do you trust in Christ as your personal Savior?

I read somewhere that being a Christian is like being in a holding pattern in an airplane above a, busy air port. You circle and circle.

You know eventuality you will land, but when, you don't know and sometimes neither does the captain. You wait and wait.

Then all at once, the announcement comes fasten seat belts and you land. Then the hurry to leave the plane because you are late.

As Christians we are in a holding pattern for meeting Christ. When? We don't know. Are you ready? Only you and God know that.

But have you seriously thought about it, or do you take your relationship with Christ in a causal way, a take it for granted way.

No seriousness, no thought of how your faith life is growing and maturing with the help of the Holy Spirit. Are you in a constant state of preparedness?

And the final warning, no not warning but assurance Christ gives the disciples is: *"But not a hair on your head will perish, By your endurance you will gain your lives"*.

Here Jesus is assuring the disciples and you and I that while we are in this holding pattern.

He Lord will be with us giving us the courage, strength, and the confidence to remain faithful to Him in spite of all the hardship or suffering that it might cause us.

The following story may sum up the kind relationship we have with Christ in the holding pattern, and the state of preparedness we find ourselves in this age of the Church.

A father and his boy of 8 and girl of 10 all good swimmers went for a swim on a nice warm summer day off the New Jersey seashore.

When some distance from shore, they became separated and the father realized that they were being carried out to sea by the tide.

He called to the girl: 'Mary, your brother and I are going to shore for help. If you get tired, turn on your back and you can float all day on your back.

I'll come back for you. Before long, many boats were on the ocean searching for the little girl. Four hours later, they found her far from shore.

She was calmly swimming on her back and was not frightened at all. She simply said; 'Daddy said he would come for me and that I could float all day, so I swam and floated because I knew he would come.

My friends, what God says is true, also. He will keep you as Jesus says in Matthew chapter 11: Come to me, all you who are tired of carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke and put it on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit and you will find rest.

For the yoke I will give you is easy and the load I will put on you is light." In our holding pattern, in our state of preparedness.

Christ is there walking with us easing our burdens, giving us the courage, the spirit to be His witnesses in this world.

Because of His presence with us through the means of grace, the Word and sacraments, and through the church.

His body, we can remain faithful and at ease with the sure confidence if Christ came today, that in that minute we would be prepared, We will be ready

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.