

Trust Christ's Promise  
Pastor Morgan Murray  
West Valley Church

Mark 13:24-31 (NRSV)

24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,  
25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Opening Question: When have you experienced FOMO – Fear of Missing Out? What is the craziest thing you've done in the name of FOMO?

We are susceptible to FOMO when there is a:

- Limited time – This offer will expire soon, so don't wait! (Black Friday)
- Limited quantity – There are only so many available, so you better get yours quick! (new game console like the PS5.)
- Limited capacity – Only so many people can have this "exclusive" experience, so you better be here when it happens! (Tickets to a concert, a premiere, or a New Year's Eve event)

There are three things we tend to do when we are in FOMO:

- We get up really early (or stay up really late) – ie, the World Series Parades
- We travel really long distances – ie, Burning Man
- We stand in really long lines – ie, Popeye's Chicken sandwich

The thing about FOMO is that the FEAR IS REAL.

Are you afraid of missing out on Christmas?

Advent and the Lectionary: Where's the Christmas in this text?

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is O Little Town of Bethlehem

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by

Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Fear is an important theme in Advent.

The church calendar has two important seasons of preparation that lead up to the two most important holy days – Christmas and Easter. Advent prepares us for Christmas, and Lent prepares us for Easter. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, and Easter celebrates Jesus' resurrection after being crucified. The Christian church in the West tends to emphasize Christmas, while the church in the East emphasizes Easter.

The Lectionary is a guide to scripture readings that correspond with the church calendar. The Psalm we heard in the Call to Worship, this gospel lesson, and the reading from the prophet Isaiah we will hear during the lighting of the Advent Candle are all chosen for this first Sunday of Advent because they come together around the theme of longing. We long for God to come near. We long for God to come and rescue us. We long for God's presence because we are SCARED.

Advent reminds us that God is near and has a human face: Jesus Christ.

For those who have come to trust in Jesus as God-with-us as a human person (what we call the Incarnation of God in the world), Christmas is a time when we celebrate two things: We celebrate that Jesus Christ has come into the world, and we celebrate that Jesus Christ is coming back.

Here's the context for this passage: Jesus is warning his disciples to watch out for "Doomsday Deceivers" (Eugene Peterson's term in *The Message* paraphrase) who gain followers by saying "I'm the One" and stoking fear. Keep your head and don't panic, Jesus says. Fake Messiahs will pop up everywhere, but don't fall for that. The Messiah will return, but the timing of that is a mystery reserved only for God the Father. No one else knows. If they tell you that they have unlocked the secret code, don't believe them.

This all sounds scary, but Jesus is speaking in order to offer comfort and guidance. Much like the parables we studied over the last few weeks from Matthew chapter 25.

Jesus comforts us by saying:

You won't miss out on Christ's return. There's no need for FOMO when it comes to Jesus claiming those who belong to him. He will dispatch his angels to pull in the chosen from every part of the earth. You don't have to "be in the right place at the right time."

I wonder if Jesus wants to assuage his disciples fears that if they travel too far away from Jerusalem in the name of serving God's kingdom and sharing the gospel, that they might get left behind? Jesus wants them to know that, wherever they are in the world, the Lord will be with them.

This promise has no expiration date. *The Message* paraphrase puts verses 30 and 31 this way: "I'm not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won't wear out."

The gospel has no "while supplies last" fine print. The Kingdom is for everybody. There is plenty of God's love to go around. To be in the middle of God's grace is to know complete abundance!

Jesus offers us this guidance: Don't take this lightly. In the same way you know how to anticipate the change of seasons, anticipate my return.

So what to do? Put your trust in Jesus again – as if for the very first time.

Morgan Murray

Transitional Pastor

West Valley Presbyterian Church

6191 Bollinger Road

Cupertino, CA 95014

408/252.1365 x111

wvpc.org