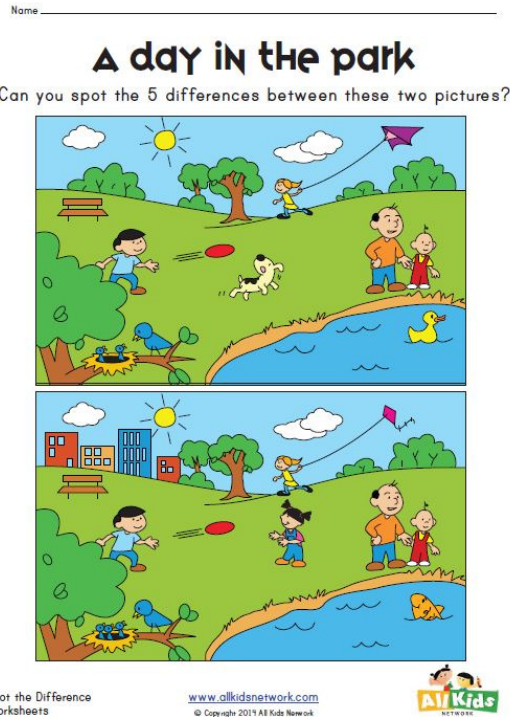


Mark 13:1-8

Children's Sermon:

Paying attention and keeping alert: "what's different" picture



Notice the differences. If you didn't really look for them, you might not be able to see them!
We need to pay attention and keep alert.

How do we pay attention to the people around us, who need our help? Who need our love?
How do we pay attention to where we see Christ in the neighbor?

Pay attention – when you see someone that is hurt on the playground or sad or happy – when you pay attention to your neighbor and someone else's need, that is showing someone Christ. God tells us to do this.

Keeping alert...keeping awake...watching. Like glasses, Christ gives us a new way of seeing.

Mark 13:1-8; 24-37

Adult Sermon:

The end. It's a strange obsession of ours, to dwell on the end of all things. The end of our lives. The end of our relationships. The end of our jobs. The end of the world.

The End Is Near.

It is hard to read this week's appointed verses without going to that well-aged, somewhat humorous image of the prophet of doom: the wild-eyed, shaggy-haired, tattered-clothed man yelling into the crowd, "The end is near!" And, if we can put end-of-the-world associations aside, this time, he's right. We can see that, for Jesus, as he looks ahead into what we now consider Holy Week, it is crystal clear that his end is near.

This is one of the reasons that I love the narrative lectionary. If you remember, we switched to this "narrative lectionary" this year and it is set up to cover the story of the Bible from September to May – and it also correlates to the church seasons and the year. So, for example, we studied the Old Testament until December 25th – or when we celebrate the birth of Christ and then following that day, we have since entered into the New Testament and stories of Jesus and his ministry.

And now we are coming upon Holy Week and Easter....beginning next Sunday, we will journey together through the events of Holy Week...from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the arrest, trial, sentencing, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. AND, the way that the narrative lectionary is set up, we are at that same spot in our scripture reading that we heard today.

Context makes a difference. Because as we will see in just a couple of weeks, it's in and through the crucifixion of Jesus that these world altering events take place. There you will see the darkened skies, an earthquake happen when the temple curtains part, the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory and the angels sent out. This is where you will see all of this. Context is important...Jesus is talking about his death on the cross. Watchfulness to darkness to conflict to the shattering of the temple – we see all of this in Jesus' crucifixion and death.

These texts shouldn't make us only think about the second coming, but it really says that all of God's future he has promised for the world breaks into us now through the death and resurrection. God's future breaks into OUR now as we observe and believe this.

But like I said at the start of this sermon, we have a strange obsession with the end. Guess what? The disciples did too. But instead of obsessing about the "end", Jesus tells us today that we should "keep awake" or in another translation "keep alert". Keep awake? Keep alert? When the people heard that the end was near, they stopped living life. They stopped working and caring because, "who cares? The end is near"! But Jesus tells them...and tells us...that no

one knows when the end will come. Nor should that be of concern to us. But we should keep alert...we should resist complacency. To keep alert isn't to just sit there and watch what's going on. It's an action verb in the greek language, meaning we are to be actively keeping alert...actively and urgently spreading the Kingdom of God here on this earth...all while knowing of course that the End will come – Jesus has promised us that! But right now, in the here and now, we are to not be complacent. To be complacent means to miss it. Jesus tells us to be prepared and be on the look out, so that we might be fully engaged in the “now” that is happening on this earth...how God is moving and using us here and **now** in His kingdom here on earth.

Last weekend, I wasn't in the office. But I did spend 46 work hours at Big Sandy Camp in McGregor, where I spent the weekend with our high school students engaging in the annual Cardia Deo Retreat that the synod puts on. During this weekend, I got to walk along side of youth as they worshiped, learned, and grew in their faith. The theme of the weekend was “sent”. How fitting. How are we sent beyond the walls of the church? How are you sent beyond the walls of your house? These high school students participated in a homeless youth simulation where they had to make choices. And every choice ended with another choice. And the choices were not easy. If you chose to go with a man who offered you some food, you could end up getting raped. Do you sacrifice your body to get nourishment? Or do you continue to have nothing to eat for the 3rd day in a row?

And these high school students struggled with what choices they would make, but they got a glimpse into the most vulnerable situations that people find themselves in. Poverty. Homelessness. Hunger. Through this activity, youth also realized the lack of systems in place right here in their own community! We have a food shelf, and a community meal, but what other resources do we have for the poor, hungry, lonely, homeless, or victims of assault? These students actually started talking about what steps are needed in order to care for these people. To provide for their basic needs! God at work! God working through these teenagers to care for His people! A seed has been planted, and if you know teenagers like I do, you know if anyone can make a difference in our world, they sure can!

Where else have you seen God at work this week? Today we recognized the vocation of teachers. Teachers – I bet a week doesn't go by that I don't hear about how you have impacted or made one of our children or youth feel important. God is at work in you and through your vocation. Coaches – you would be amazed at the impact that you have on these teen's lives. I have seen God at work through our very own confirmation students – they have created a prayer wall between the fellowship hall and the gym on the glass windows...check it out. All on their own, they came up with people whom they are praying for, and as they wrote those names in each of the bubbles, prayers were said. Another group served at the soup kitchen this week, another group is meeting with members of our congregation who reside at Aikota Nursing home this week to get to know them so that they can pray for them! God is at work!

Isn't this what we are called to do? To go out and spread the kingdom? To care for and love our neighbors? Where in your life are you able to do that? Where in your life are you taking Jesus'

words today seriously and constantly being on alert...constantly spreading God's love through your words and actions?

Our text today, and the contemplations of Holy Week, make us long for the 'empty tomb', and the promise of resurrection and new life all the more. Easter day, without the darkness and upheaval that proceeds it (just like Christmas without Isaiah's crooked way), becomes diluted in significance almost to the point that it becomes only a season of Easter bunnies and chocolate eggs. Our journey through this season accelerates at this point in the narrative. We are reminded to be watchful for there is a great need to be ready to greet God and be ready to be used by God.

People of God: keep alert, stay awake! Bring light where there is darkness. Bring love where there is hatred. Bring hope where there is anguish. Bring peace where there is violence. Speak the truth to a hurting world that this is not all that there is, for the One who we follow is faithful and has not abandoned us: we need not fear. Go now, and share God's blessing, this day, and always.

Thanks be to God. Amen.