**A Sure Thing That Cannot Be Seen 2017 12 03**

**Mark 13: 24-37 Pr. Hitoshi Adachi**

May God’s Grace and Love be poured into the people’s hearts in this sanctuary!

One day, a mother of three was baptized. Although her husband did not identify himself as Christian, he was a generous person loving his wife. He and their 8-year old son were witnessing the spouse/mother’s baptism.

Right after the Holy Baptism/Communion service, the priest and the son had a chance to talk to each other. The priest asked him, “What do you think about your mother’s baptism?” With bright eyes and a broad smile, he said, “Being baptized and becoming a Christian is to believe something you cannot see.”

I was baptized when I was seven years old. I remember that my grandfather said to me “Do not be afraid” in the morning of that day, there were my parents and godparents surrounding me, my head was submerged in the baptismal font’s water for several seconds. However, I am very sure that I did not think about being Christian is to believe in something you cannot see.

The priest was surprised by the 8-year old child’s clever comment, and replied him. “Taro, you think about baptism very thoughtfully.” The child continued, “I am not sure about how I can believe in something I cannot see.” What do you think? How can you believe in something you cannot see?

The Gospel text today that I read a few minutes ago ends with Jesus’ word “Keep Awake”. What does this mean? Did Jesus infer that if you always keep your eyes open, you will see Jesus return as an ascendant figure? Is he saying never sleep again?

This is probably a too literal interpretation of today’s text. Jesus told many parables. His expressions were very metaphoric. What is Jesus’ true intention of “Keep awake” to the people listening to him 2000 years ago and now?

When I think about the time Jesus was telling this message, Jewish leaders were starting to think about the plot to kill him. Also, I would like to add that Mark wrote the Gospel text maybe about 30 years after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Beginning during that time, believers were severely persecuted for over two centuries. Both Jesus’ Crucifixion and believers’ persecution were foretold by Jesus.

Jesus knew he would be crucified and believers would be persecuted, but Jesus was telling them, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Even though Jesus was forsaken by all his disciples, beaten, crucified, and buried, God raised him from the grave. Not only he was resurrected, he revealed his wounded body to his disciples saying, “Peace be with you.” Through the cross, his death and resurrection, human beings learned God’s love, mercy, and grace are continuously poured out to us unconditionally.

Even when the ages came when Christian persecutions were so bloody, and even when the end of the world comes, human beings can live in Hope that eternal life with the love of Christ continues.

Let us get back to what Jesus said, “my word will not pass away.” What is “my word”? What will not pass away? Through history we witnessed after Jesus’ death and resurrection, that “God’s mercy, love, and grace will not pass away, even when heaven and earth pass away.” To me, “Jesus’ word” is “God’s Grace, Love, and Mercy.

What is the scripture today teaching us in the context of the second decade of the 21st century? About 10 years ago, in the middle of the first decade one of the books I read at Luther Seminary, indicated that about 20 years from 2015, there would be an age when divisions and chaotic situations would arise due to new leaders of the United States.

You might be thinking and worrying about the President of the US and his appointed officials. People think not only about the US Government but also about many different corporations, institutions, and even officials at the community level. Because of character flaws, leaders at every level of our communities would find it difficult to protect themselves from conflicts and prevent divisions, according to the book I read.

I think every one of us living in today’s society needs to realize that social disparities are increasing and people are being marginalized. Christ’s love and grace are not for only a few, they are for everyone.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus Christ is indicating the end of the world and his own second advent. I believe many of us do not understand well about the end of world, I have always thought that, rather than worrying and speculating about the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ, we should rejoice these events. We were born into this world and the length of our lives shortens as we live them. It is true, someday our earthly lives will end.

I believe the word of Jesus gives tremendous hope and trustworthy guidance to people in this current age. After Jesus said, “heaven and earth will pass away, my word will not pass away”, he said “keep awake (or alert)” three times.

I believe “keep awake” is guiding us to be alert for God’s grace and love and, for us, to respond to his love.

In facing this difficult age and eventually when we face our own deaths, God is guiding us, baptized Christians to be alert for God’s love and mercy that we cannot concretely see but always surrounds us. We are to share the love of Christ to shape our lives (and others’ lives) in his grace. Amen.