

“Watchful Waiting for Our Glorious Homecoming”

Text: Mark 13:24–37, Isaiah 51:4–6, and Jude 20–25

When you picture in your mind the Last Day and Jesus' return, what images come to mind? For me it's one of homecoming, I was reminded this past week of the classic TV show M*A*S*H. A sitcom set during the Korean War, about a group of army doctors and nurses as they navigated the trials and tribulations of caring for the wounded. Despite the chaos and suffering, there was an underlying theme: the perpetual desire to go home, and as someone who grew up in Toledo, Ohio I always got a laugh from hometown actor Jamie Farr who constantly talked about going home to my beloved Toledo. This universal longing to go home resonated with viewers, making the series finale the most-watched TV event in history. People stayed up to witness the characters finally return home, a testament to the show's ability to tap into a fundamental human yearning. Incidentally, this final episode also was instrumental in my decision to attend our Fort Wayne seminary, and if you ask me about it perhaps someday I'll share with you the rather amusing reason why!

Jesus' final return signifies our ultimate homecoming. Not to earthly dwellings, but to our true home, His home. Unlike some homes in this world, His home is a place of perfect peace, where hunger, thirst, hurt, and tears are absent. It's a realm of righteousness, devoid of sin. A place of eternal rest after life's battles. So, as Jesus urges us today, let us stay awake and anticipate this, our blessed and longed for homecoming.

It's easy to grow weary in the constant battle against sin and Satan. The relentless struggle can be exhausting, especially when hope for a better future seems so distant. Some might turn to distractions like pleasure, work, or simply “going with the flow”, leading to spiritual slumber. We may even begin to cling to this world, forgetting our true home. This is a danger that plagued the Israelites in Babylonian exile, the characters of M*A*S*H, and countless believers in our world today.

When life's trials which on the surface seem unwelcome, awaken us from spiritual slumber, they serve as a divine wake-up call. They remind us of the ongoing battle against sin and the hope offered by our Savior. In these moments, we're graciously being urged and invited to turn back to God in repentance and faith.

Jesus' profound statement, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” challenges our conventional understanding of permanence. We often assume the physical world is enduring, while words are fleeting. Yet, Scripture reveals the opposite to be true: the physical realm is temporary, while God's Word endures eternally.

I mentioned earlier that I grew up in Toledo, as so you can imagine that living in the southern tip of Lake Erie we spent a lot of time on the water.

I remember one such outing in which we had spent the day on South Bass Island and upon our return a storm came in. Our little cabin cruiser was tossed about wildly and despite the assurances of our parents that we were in no danger, the expressions on their faces told a different story. Long story short, we made it back to port and I was never so glad to step onto solid ground in my life. I thought of that solid ground as permanent, but truly as we heard Isaiah prophesy in our Old Testament reading today, there is nothing permanent about it, “the heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment,” and only Jesus’ words, the Word of the Lord, will remain forever.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is an eternal force that cannot be silenced. Satan, recognizing the Word’s power, and sought to extinguish it through crucifixion. He intended to silence the Word that had

- spoken creation into existence,
- cursed his rebellion,
- promised a Savior, and
- inspired patriarchs and prophets.

The Word, filled with otherworldly wisdom, resisted Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. It spoke with divine authority, cleansing lepers, forgiving sins, offering hope to the outcast, and raising the dead. Yet, Satan’s attempts to silence this life-giving, world-transforming Word were futile.

The cross didn’t alter God; rather, God transformed the cross. He turned an instrument of death into a symbol of life that proclaims His love and mercy to the world.

On the cross, we witness the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy: God’s justice shines as a light for all nations. There, the Lamb of God, the only one capable of atoning for sin, paid the ultimate price. The cross, once a threat, now stands as a promise. Jesus has fulfilled the demands of the law on our behalf. Through Him, the darkness of sin is replaced by the light of life, as He proclaimed, “I am the Light of the world.” This Light illuminates those who dwell in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death, offering hope to weary souls. The cross shines as a beacon of light for all people.

Isaiah prophesied that on the cross, we would witness the arms of God judging the nations. But these arms are outstretched not in anger and rage, but in love. The sinless One was condemned to bear our guilt, so that we, the guilty, might be declared righteous. The cross, once a symbol of condemnation, has become a proclamation of forgiveness. A tool of death has been transformed into a throne of life, from which the Son of God prayed, “Father, forgive them.” The same voice that spoke creation into existence and raised the dead has spoken this word of forgiveness, and it is true for you.

The cross, far from silencing God, silenced Satan and his accusations. On the third day, and ever since, the voice of God, our Savior has been speaking. He speaks words of forgiveness, blessing, and life. These words are essential as you navigate the battles against sin within you, sin inflicted upon you, and sin inflicted by you. These are strenuous battles, but amidst the weariness and wounds, Jesus offers you peace, “Peace be with you.” He assures you of His forgiveness and the ultimate victory over Satan. While heaven and earth may pass away, His words endure eternally.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus is making all things new. He is creating a new heaven, a new earth, and a new you. Through His powerful Word, He bestows upon you the fruits of His sacrifice, providing not always what you desire, but always what you truly need. He invites you to die with Him, rise with Him, and live eternally with Him. His victory over death and Satan is absolute. His Word of forgiveness and life endures forever. These are not mere earthly words, but heavenly, eternal words.

You don’t have to ascend to heaven to hear these heavenly, eternal words. They’re spoken here, TO you, and FOR you. Here, amidst life’s battles, Jesus is making all things new. As He promised, “This generation will not pass away without seeing these things take place.” You see them, though hidden, through the eyes of faith. Jesus comes to you each Sunday and every day through His Word, raising you from sin to life, from fear to hope. He forgives, feeds, cleanses, strengthens, and promises.

Jesus also reminds us that the time to go home has not yet arrived. Despite the ripe signs and the shortness of time, we must remain vigilant and continue the battle. Many souls need to be snatched from the fires of sin and death, Jude reminds us in our Epistle today. They need mercy, compassion, and prayer. The time for our eternal home is coming, but not yet. We must return to the world, even though it is difficult and the enemy is relentless. We must love, serve, and keep on keeping on. When the time is right, Jesus will take us home to be with Him. Fear not.

Until that day, we gather here in this home away from home, united in Christ Jesus, partaking of His body and blood with the family of God. We don’t go alone—He’s with us and within us, sustaining and shielding us. When the final day arrives, the great and awesome Day of the Lord, we’ll be ready and awake, not because of our own efforts, but because of His grace.

Dear children, the fruits of His cross are ready and ripe. Your Lord bids you to come... until He comes to take you to your forever home. In the name of Jesus, Amen.