

## **A Week of Preparation**

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Mark 13:32-37

Mark loved using apocalyptic imagery. He was, like Jesus, an Apocalyptic Jewish Prophet. The imagery that he uses concerning the Second Coming of Jesus is mostly taken from Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel. It is language that is difficult for us to wrap our minds around. What is not so difficult to understand in this passage are Mark's pleas to "Take heed," and "to watch." For me, the main point that Mark is making is that we need to develop a "density of readiness" for a Christ event that carries the possibilities of transformation. Reading this passage metaphorically, which is, for me, the only way to read much of Mark, is to prepare for a spiritual event of the heart which moves us to see all of life from a new and transformed spiritual perspective.

Today marks the beginning of the end to the Christmas season. The next 7 days is the final push of preparation for what will take place a week from now. Outwardly, I would suppose, we are mostly prepared. My concern this morning, however, is "*How do we prepare inwardly?*" which has been, traditionally, an important Quaker concern.

First of all, we can prepare inwardly by seeking to live in a spirit of patience. This is a season of *impatience*, and the words from the Gospel of Mark that I just read, heighten our anxiety. Mark was what I would call an "A.R.," or an "Anxiety Raiser." He uses the word "Immediately," 42 different times in his short Gospel. In many ways, Mark could be the patron saint of impatient America. We want it yesterday. If you are anything like me, you want to step into an elevator just as the door is closing...Arrive in a bank or a grocery store just as the clerk opens a new line...Enter a meeting just as it is called to order...Meet a publishing deadline with a minute to spare...Be the first in line at a traffic light. We hate waiting for anything!

By and large, Western Civilization is one of activism. The fast pace of life and sense of urgency affects us all...in our homes, in our work, and in our politics. There is a wonderful cartoon from the New Yorker Magazine that shows an American couple running up the stairs of the Louvre in Paris, shouting, "Quick, show us the Mona Lisa, we're double parked!"

And yet, amidst all of the impatience of the season, to prepare inwardly, we need to be patient. As we find ourselves in the rush of all of the activities and demands of the season, may we remember to be patient...patient with others, and patient with ourselves as we await the celebration of Christmas.

**A second way to prepare inwardly for a spiritual event of the heart, is to live in a spirit of vulnerability. Becoming vulnerable takes on more spiritual meaning as we mature. To be open and vulnerable to new experiences that challenge old ways and well-ordered patterns of living, is to know about pain and discomfort...It is also an important way to prepare for a spiritual transformation of the heart.**

**Have you noticed how throughout the Bible, when God breaks into the human condition, it is always from *outside* the religious establishment? Think about those vulnerable Shepherds, who accepted their vulnerability when they were told about the birth of Jesus. In Scripture, God believes that these Shepherds would be more open to such news than the Temple leaders. Opening themselves to ridicule and teasing by their peers, they went to the place where the angels delivered them, and there they saw, lying in a manger, the hope of the world.**

**This last week before Christmas 2017, may we become vulnerable to the new...To new experiences of the Spirit in our midst, allowing God to challenge our sense of control and protection. The more open and vulnerable we become, and the more authentic we can be with others, the closer we will feel to God, and the more intimate will be our relationships with one another.**

**Finally, we can prepare for Christmas inwardly by finding times in our chaotic and noisy lives for silence. Silence has always played an important role in my spiritual development, as I am sure it has in yours. Silence is a means to a deeper relationship with the Living God. It is, I am convinced, the place where spirituality is nurtured and where it grows. To still the competing voices within us, and the clamor without us, is to provide that time and space necessary for the "still small voice" of the Living God to be heard and then responded to. You may remember that wonderful sign in front of the Friends Meetinghouse in Cambridge, England, "Don't just do something, SIT!" During this busy last week before Christmas, take time to sit in silent, hopeful, expectant waiting, and be open to transformational possibilities.**

**And so, we prepare inwardly...by living in a spirit of patience...by becoming open and vulnerable to the wonder of the season, and by immersing ourselves in that deep spiritual silence where the Inner Light can be felt and responded to. *Patience, Vulnerability and Silence*, will, in the words of Mark, help to keep us *alert, awake and ready* for a transformational event of the heart.**