

November 29, 2020
The First Sunday in Advent
Year B
Mark 13:24-37
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Zoom Worship during the Coronavirus Pandemic
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

“Unus Annus” One Year, A New Year

“*Unus Annus, Unus Annus, Unus Annus.*” The chant rang through our house. Abigail shouting *Unus*, Julia replying *Annus*.

Well, I figured, Abigail is taking Latin and we’re in lockdown, so why wouldn’t she and her sister be shouting Latin words at each other for no apparent reason. But if you hear something often enough chances are good that you might get curious enough to ask some questions.

Like, “Why are you doing that?”

Like, “Is there an apparent reason that you’re marching around the house tossing the same two Latin words back and forth at each other like you’re playing catch—still—again?”

I was pretty sure that I knew what the words meant. I never took Latin, but the words they were saying weren’t very complex. *Unus*, obviously meant one. Sesame Street taught me to count to ten in Spanish and I’ve played Uno.

Annus, well, this time high school Spanish helped me out. *Annus* sounds a lot like the Spanish word for year, *año*, and like the root of English words like “annual”, so it clearly meant “year”.

My kids, since, sometimes the boys got involved, were walking the house often shouting “One Year” in Latin, *Unus Annus, Unus Annus, Unus Annus*. But why?

Like I said, I was finally persuaded to ask. And they told me that it was because of a YouTube channel called *Unus Annus*.

Unus Annus is a YouTube channel that was created by two YouTubers named Mark and Ethan, also known as Markaplier and Crankgameplays.

At midnight on November 15, 2019 the two YouTube stars, launched their new project. They would create a video a day for one year and then once the year was over, they would delete all of the content that they had created, which meant that if you didn't engage with it during its one year, you would miss your chance.

This is what they said they said when they launched their *Unus Annus* project:

We live our lives taking each second for granted. But what would you do if you knew how much time you had left? Unus Annus. One year. This channel, much like all of you, has a limited amount of time. And every day we march ever closer to this channel's inevitable doom. That means we'll be uploading every single day until the clock strikes zero. And then, it's game over. Bye, bye. Finito. Finished. Curtains. Gone, gone. Night, night. Dead. Forever. Make no mistake, this doesn't mean that we'll just stop uploading. When time runs out we will be deleting this channel and every single video on it. And you'll never be able to see them again. Because much like death, you can't take it with you. And all we'll have is the memories that we make along the way... so the clock starts now. But the choice is yours. Will you join us? Or will you miss out on your one chance to be a part of Unus Annus? Because time is already running out. The train is already moving. So, subscribe now, because death is coming... For there are no second chances. And

if you miss out all you'll be left with is regret. Memento mori. We'll see you tomorrow. Unus Annus.

Over the course of the year the YouTubers did exactly what they said that they would do, they uploaded a new video every day. In some of the videos they tried to learn something new. In some they tried to challenge themselves to conquer some of their fears or to test their endurance in some way. In some of the videos they just did a lot of silly things that would entertain their audience. In all of the videos they tried, in some way, to explore what it meant to be alive.

Along the way they gained 4.5 million subscribers to their expiration dated YouTube channel, they sold a lot of limited time only merchandise, they entertained a lot of people, and they even touched some people's hearts. With their antics, their style, and their philosophy they created a sense of community. 1.5 million people watched them live when they deleted *Unus Annus* at midnight on November 14, 2020.

As part of their commitment to *Unus Annus*, their one-year project, being gone after one year, they asked their fans not to re-upload their videos after the project ended and they said that they would seek to have them removed by YouTube if they did discover that any of their *Unus Annus* videos had been reuploaded.

If we were all together in one physical space, I would ask by show of hands if any of you had ever heard of the *Unus Annus* YouTube project. Then I would ask if anyone had ever watched an *Unus Annus* video.

I suspect that the number of people who raised their hands to say yes to either of those questions would be pretty low.

Even I could only raise my hand, yes, to one of those questions. I heard of the project because my kids told me about it. My kids watched some, though not all of the videos. But I never saw one of the videos myself, and of course, now, 15 days after the YouTube channel was deleted I never can. Even if I could track down one of the deleted videos that had been uploaded to YouTube, against the wishes of the creators, I wouldn't watch it for the principle of the thing.

I realize that, in general, you who are gathered here today for this worship service, might not be a group that is particularly plugged into the YouTube scene. Honestly, I'm not either, but still, ever since my kids told me about the *Unus Annus* project it has interested me.

We live in a time when music is recorded, when we have DVRs, when you can find almost any form of entertainment on DVDs or the internet. Right now, we can even go back and re-watch worship services. Thanks to digital media, almost every experience is repeatable.

Not that I think that that a bad thing, entirely or even at all, but it does take some sense of urgency out of life. It gives us the sense that we can always do it later, watch it later, experience it later.

But sometimes later never comes, Sometimes, "I'll do it someday" turns into "I meant to do that."

Now, if we're talking about "I meant to do that..." when it's only some form of entertainment that I meant to watch, then it's certainly not the end of the world if we never get to it, but sometimes we end up with "I meant to's...." in the realm of our schoolwork, our work, or worse yet, our relationships, and that's when our "put it off until later" culture really gets troubling.

Last week, the chant was ringing out in our house again, “*Unus Annus, Unus Annus, Unus Annus*” a chant for a YouTube channel and it hit me in a different way, considering where we are in the church year and what our gospel reading is for today.

As for where we are in the church year, we are at the beginning of a new one. For the church, this is when we could be wishing each other a Happy New Year. We are moving from Year A to Year B, from the gospel of Matthew to the gospel of Mark for our lectionary cycle, our Sunday morning readings.

We are leaving ordinary time, what is called “The Time of the Church”, the long, green and growing season, when our readings for worship are focused on the teachings of Jesus, which help us to ponder what it means to live as individuals and as a community that follows Jesus, and which lasts about half the year from June to November, the Festival of the Holy Trinity to the Festival of Christ the King.

We are starting what could be called “The Time of Christ” when our readings for worship are focused on the story of Jesus’ life and which lasts the other six months of the year, approximately December to May, Advent to Pentecost.

Today begins that cycle and with it a whole new church year. And in what might seem like a strange move for us, rather than the “time of Christ” beginning with the beginning of Jesus life, the beginning of the story of Jesus’ miraculous conception and birth, the church year begins, this Advent begins, as every Advent does, with visions of the end.

We know this time as a time that we spend getting reading for Christmas. Again, if we were together in one physical place, I would ask you

how many of you started decorating for Christmas this weekend, or even, this year, before Thanksgiving.

I suspect that a lot of you would raise your hands. It's the getting ready time. The countdown to Christmas has begun. One candle on the Advent wreath has been lit. Pretty soon children or even adults who have Advent calendars will start opening their little doors, getting reading for Christmas, one day at a time.

But today's gospel reading, though it certainly tells us to get ready for something, does not feel like it is getting us ready for Christmas.

Today's gospel reading comes from deep in the 16-chapter gospel of Mark, from chapter 13 three chapters from the end and that's where this Advent starts. It starts at the end.

Jesus is talking with some of his disciples, teaching them about the fact that life is a fleeting thing, and that the things that seem to them to be so powerful, so permanent, so unwavering in their strength, will pass away.

The discussion that we have part of in our gospel reading for today begins with Jesus' disciples pointing out the features, the strength of the Temple complex in Jerusalem. One of Jesus' disciples, clearly impressed by the Temple that Herod had renovated and added onto says, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

Jesus' response is, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down." (Mark 13:1-2)

Then as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives looking out over the Temple the end of which he had just declared, four of his disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew came and asked Jesus to tell them more.

So, he did, and today's gospel reading is part of what he taught them.

He told them about persecutions and destruction and natural disasters and the suffering of his own followers. And then he talked about the coming of the Son of Man, which is the way that gospels all speak about Jesus' return in glory, in some distant future, surrounded by angels, and coming in a time that no one could know, that no one could foretell. The message is that people needed to watch for it, to wait for it, to be ready, not to take time for granted, not to put off preparing for the Son of Man's return, to keep awake.

He told them that, while they could not know when the Son of Man would return, they should live every day in expectation of it. They should fill every day not with "I should have's" or "I meant to's" or "I wish I had's", but with hope, with eyes wide open, with hands wide open, with hearts wide open, expecting and trusting that the Son of Man will come, that weeping will turn into joy, that mourning will turn into dancing. That message is for us too, that whether it is with Jesus' powerful second coming or whether it is when our eyes close in death and open to Jesus' peace, Jesus' welcome, Jesus' glory, we are called to live our lives knowing that Jesus is with us often unseen, but someday, and no one knows when or how, seen, clear, unmistakable.

Weirdly enough, whether they knew it or not, and I suspect that they didn't YouTube creators Mark and Ethan, who call themselves in their professional/entertainment lives Markaplier and Crankgameplays, echoed, if not Jesus' words, then certainly some of his message in their deleted YouTube channel.

They said, "We live our lives taking each second for granted."
Jesus said, "But about that day or hour no one knows...." (Mark 13:32)

They said, “But what would you do if you knew how much time you had left? *Unus Annus*.” Jesus said, “Be aware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” (Mark 13:33)

They said, “One year. This channel, much like all of you, has a limited amount of time.” They said, “Memento mori—remember death”

Jesus said, “Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cock crow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:35-37)

Of course, here we are at the beginning of a new year, and at the beginning we are asked to remember the end.

We don’t know what will happen this year, just like we didn’t know what would happen last year. All we know is that this is the time that we have been given, this *Unus Annus*. One year, a new year, another year, to hope, to watch, to pray, to reach out, and to live like it matters what we do, how we spend our time.

We have another year to remember that the end is coming, and with it, Jesus, our hope, our life, our Lord, our friend, the one who is Emmanuel, God with us, God coming to us.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.