First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

August 7, 2022

People Get Ready

Luke 12:32-40

**32**“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. **33**Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. **34**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **35**“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; **36**be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. **37**Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. **38**If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

**39**“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he[a] would not have let his house be broken into. **40**You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

How many of you remember the 1965 Impressions song, “People Get Ready?” Without telling you how old I was in 1965, I will say that this is one of my top 10 favorite songs. I learned it in my home church in Seattle and the choir sang it on a regular basis. The song’s message of deliverance for all who want it, truly resonates with my understanding of the Gospel, with the first verse going like this, (and before y’all ask, no I’m not going to sing it for you). “*People get ready, there's a train a-comin’ don't need no baggage, you just get on board All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin’ Don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord.”*

So, you may be wondering what connection a 60 year old song has to today’s reading. How do they relate to one another? And you may be asking yourselves, Pastor, are you just trying to fill up space? These are valid questions and, on the surface, there really doesn’t seem to be any connection at all. As to the question of whether or not I’m simply padding the sermon, well, feel free to tell me after the service if you don’t think that I was able to tie it all together.

Today’s reading starts out with Jesus reassuring his listeners that it’s God’s true pleasure to give us the Kingdom. These are important words, especially considering last week’s text where we heard about the rich fool’s possession obsession problem. Relax! Jesus is saying, don’t be afraid, stop being anxious! God’s going to take care of you. He tells us to sell our possessions and give alms and, in doing so, Jesus goes on to remind us that only by storing up riches in heaven, where no thief can get to it and no moth can destroy it, are we truly able to follow him. The kicker comes in verse 34, where we are told that, “… Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

That’s great, if we can get past our fear and anxiety. And letting go of our fears and our anxieties can be tough. When the bank account is low and the bills are piling up, I think it’s only natural for us to become anxious and fearful. Even for those who have strong faith, letting go of these types of anxieties can prove difficult.

But Jesus’ assurance that God wants us to live fulfilled happy lives and is ready, willing and able to give us the Kingdom, really does calm me, when I’m in anxious mode. Aw, pastor, some of you may be thinking, I just don’t have that kind of faith. When I hear that, I’m reminded of Luke 17:6, which reads, “…*If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”* If you look past the hyperbolic language of this verse, which honestly does feel kind of impossible to live up to, you’ll see the point Luke is trying to make, is that it doesn’t take a whole lot of faith to step back and let God take charge of whatever situation we find ourselves in. The key, of course, is letting go of our fear and getting out of God’s way.

Starting in verse 35, we hear about how we need to be alert and dressed for action, with our lamps lit, because we don’t know when the Master will return and bring about the Kingdom that God has promised us as our inheritance. The idea that the arrival of the Kingdom of God is an event that will happen sometime in the future, has permeated the interpretation of scripture for centuries.

But what if we look at this a bit differently? What if we look at the advice to get ready for some future event as presented, in both the Impression’s song (bet you thought I’d forgotten about that), and today’s text, in another way? What if instead of keeping alert for the return of Jesus, or getting ready for a far off occurrence where the righteous are lifted up to heaven, we consider the possibility the second coming of Jesus has already happened, the kingdom is already here, and Jesus walks among us this very day? Are we ready for that possibility? Are we ready to even entertain what that might mean for us and for the world? Here’s another question for you; If Jesus walks the earth right now, what do you suppose he looks like?

I had an interesting conversation, last week, with someone who asked me what Jesus really looked like. Was he middle eastern? Was he of African descent? Just what does Jesus look like?We’re all familiar with the picture, a copy of which hangs in the fellowship hall, of light skinned Jesus knocking at the door. A copy of this same picture has hung in my parents house for as long as I can remember, and copies of it hang in every single Mormon meeting house all over the world. The image of light skinned Jesus works for those of us who are of European descent, but what about those Christians who are of Asian or African or Hispanic heritage? And, in the end, does it really matter if a depiction of our Lord and Savior looks like someone other than the image we see in the mirror? If an African Jesus, or an Asian Jesus, or a Middle Eastern Jesus allows people of African, Asian or Middle Eastern descent to better relate to, and live out, the good news of the gospel, I don’t see an issue with that. Are we ready to entertain the possibility that Jesus doesn’t look like us?

So, if we open our minds, and our hearts, to the possibility that Jesus is here; that the second coming has already happened, what does that mean for us in a twenty-first century context? In the second half of verse 37, we read, *“Truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”* When I read these words, the image that comes to my mind is of Jesus tying on an apron, standing behind a steam table, and serving the homeless in a soup kitchen. It’s an image that, for me, is incredibly comforting and, at the same time humbling. That the Savior of the world would do such a thing, shouldn’t surprise us at all and yet, there are those who can’t imagine such a thing, because it just doesn’t fit with their view of what the Lord of all creation would be or do. I suspect that folks who think this way, wouldn’t be caught dead serving food in a soup kitchen to a ragged bunch of homeless folk.

And, that’s the point here isn’t it? Some people struggle with the idea of Jesus walking amongst us, here and now, because it means that they’d no longer be able to ignore the clarion call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Some people struggle with the idea that Jesus may look differently than they do, because it means that they have to examine the way they treat people of different races and cultures.

It would be so much easier to kick the can down the road; to think about the second coming as some grand event in the future, because by thinking that way, we can continue to ignore the message of the gospel. If the second coming happens sometime “out there” then we can continue living in our little bubbles, saying to ourselves, “Oh, I’ll start helping the homeless at some point, but I’m too busy today.” “Maybe tomorrow, I’ll start being God’s hands and feet but not today, I’m tired.”

Here’s the thing, verse 40 puts all of that kicking the can down the road nonsense to rest, *“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*  We are not called to just sit around waiting for Jesus to return in clouds of glory, instead we are called to be alert and ready for action, because the Son of Man can show up at anytime.

Would we recognize Jesus, if we passed him on the street? Is it possible that Jesus is standing in front of you in the checkout line at the supermarket? Could Jesus be that ragged homeless man you serve in the soup line? Or maybe Jesus is standing next to you, apron tied around his waist, dishing up some tasty minestrone soup.

We simply do no know when Jesus is going to walk among us again. We simply do not know which pectoral depiction of Jesus is the “correct one.” Until we know for certain, how can we assume that we haven’t already encountered our risen Lord? The possibility that we regularly run into Jesus in our day to day interactions, should put a whole new spin on how we treat everyone we come into contact with.

Let me close by quoting a hymn written by Fred Kaan in 1966: *“We meet you, O Christ, in many a guise; your image we see in simple and wise. You live in a palace, exist in a shack. We see You, the gardener, a tree on your back.”*

Folks, are we ready to see Jesus in all of his guises? Your assignment, this week, is to treat each and every person you come into contact with, as if they are the embodiment of our Lord and Savior, himself. Because, here’s the thing, they are.

AMEN