

Be More than Prepared

Luke 12:32-40

READ Luke 12:32-40

I don't suppose anyone has tried to total up all the money and time spent on trying to predict the future. Some of that future-telling is financial – we want to know what the stock market is going to do or the future price of crops or the direction of interest rates because knowing those things would allow us to make investment decisions that would improve our financial security. Some of the future telling has to do with worry – we think if we knew for sure what was going to happen tomorrow, we would not worry about it. I've said this before: it is a great gift of the grace of God that we do not know the future because it would terrify us. There is a great line in a Bob Seger song that goes "I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then." What he is talking about in that song is the kind of knowledge comes from personal experience, and we have all likely had some experiences that we really wish we had not had. So we know some things that we would really be better off not knowing. The truth is, if we knew all of what would happen tomorrow, we would worry more, not less – it would just be a more specific sort of worry. In the verses preceding the passage we just read, Jesus says "Don't do that." Pretty simple, straightforward message. Worry is a faith challenge, and Jesus says "Trust me, and don't worry."

I want to cover what seems really important to me about this passage in the same kind of simple, straightforward way. Here's what I get from it... and these are in reverse order of the lessons I find in this passage.

We should be more than prepared for the presence of Jesus. Jesus uses the example of servants waiting for the master's return to illustrate this point. Those servants for whom this time and story turn out well are the ones who are prepared for the master's presence, and they are prepared because they have faith that the master will return as he had said he would. They have the house ready and a meal ready, and most importantly, they have themselves ready.

It would be easy for us to read this passage only as a warning about being prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which in some form or another is the end of this age – the end of life as we know it. Many fortunes have been made selling books and lectures and videos and Bible studies by people claiming to be able to connect end-time prophecies found in various places in the Bible to current events, and from that generate predictions about the Second Coming. Everyone who has made predictions like that so far has been wrong. Yet general interest in these purported future tellers never seems to diminish. What would we do with this knowledge? How would it change your life if you knew the Second Coming was going to be on Thursday of next week? The better question is this: if you know there are things you need to change in your life, why haven't you already done it? Why would you be waiting for news of the Second Coming? Here's another question: How would it change your life if you knew for absolute, dead certain that the Second Coming is not tomorrow? The specific direction to be more than prepared works no matter when or how Jesus comes again.

But I do not think this passage has anything to do with the Second Coming. The people that Jesus was talking to had no concept of a Second Coming; they were still experiencing the First Coming live and in person. The message for them, which is the message for us, is that we should always be prepared to experience the presence of God. Being more than prepared means that we should not just have some vague idea that God will be bringing about some dramatic earth-shattering event – we should live every moment, every day with the expectation that God will be with us in a very real and personal way in every moment. In the illustration that Jesus used here, the servant's expectation was real and personal, and it was founded in their faith in the master. So it should be with us – a real and personal expectation of the presence of God, all the time, founded in our faith. See God in your past – Feel God in your present – Imagine God in your future. Not just some apocalyptic future – the next five minutes future, and the next five minutes after that. In last year's movie "The Avengers" the head agent played by Samuel L. Jackson is confronted by one of his agents who is panicking because of the impending threat of some extraterrestrial bad guys. She says something like "What are

we going to do?” to which he replies “Until such time as the world ends, we will act as though it intends to spin on.” Jesus is telling us here to be living as though the world intends to spin on, but in the certainty of God’s presence in it. Worried about tomorrow? God will meet you there; God is already there waiting for you.

We talked last week about choosing our treasure, and Jesus repeats that lesson for us here in a specific instruction about using our resources for the benefit of other people. We immediately connect the idea of resources to our money, but this is also about our time and our thoughts and our prayers. When we become part of the United Methodist Church, we make promises to God, to the church, and to each other to be generous and gracious with our time, our talents, our gifts, our service, and our witness. All the direction here is to us, with nothing said about the recipients or the impact of this sharing of resources on them. The impact of the sharing of resources is on us, as we live out God’s commands to love God first, and love our neighbors. We get to experience the benefits of living in accordance with God’s will, in the abundance of His grace, as we act as instruments of His grace.

But maybe the greatest lesson here is the astonishing statement that Jesus begins with: “...your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” The New Revised Standard Version gives this in the present tense: “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The concepts are the same. Almighty God, Creator and Master of the universe, Sustainer of all things, offers you His kingdom for your very own, not because you have earned it, but because it pleases God to do that. If you had been among the original hearers of this Word, you would have been blown away, and we should be, too. I took these lessons in reverse order from the passage, because this is so huge, so incredible that it makes it hard to concentrate on the rest of it. God offers you more than you could ever want or wish for or worry about simply because God loves you and it pleases Him to offer it all to you. His love and mercy and forgiveness and grace – in measures greater than we could ever imagine – are ours. We come to God with all kinds of requests and supplications, but I doubt we have ever been audacious enough to ask for the kingdom. Yet here it is, offered to us just because.

What God is offering us in this giving of the kingdom is life in His presence – this life, now and real, and eternal life, promised. That is the foundation of our living, and the foundation of our expectation for this moment and the next. Everything else is just noise. He calls us to focus on Him, to hear His constant call, to love Him as He loves us, to not be surprised by His presence because we are expecting Him. That’s personal. That’s relationship. That’s faith. And that is who God calls us to be, all the time.

Amen