

The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Genesis 15:1-6

Hebrews 11:1-16

Luke 12:22-40

How many of y'all are ready? If something horrific were to happen to the United States, if something catastrophic were to befall Southern California, how many of y'all are ready? I don't suspect that many of us are preppers. Preppers are those who see emergency on the horizon and are determined to survive. It is quite literally a social movement, survivalism, that focuses on being prepared for natural disasters or radical economic upheaval or nuclear fallout. Preppers build bunkers with stockpiles of food supplies, medicine, firearms and bullets; lots and lots of bullets. They aren't insane, necessarily. Such a thing could happen. They are zealous. From my point of view, they are overzealous.

But back to my initial question, a personal question: are *you* ready? Alise and I have stored a few things, nothing too substantial. As an aside, if something were to happen that alters the world as we know it, I would likely come here. If you are willing and can make it, I would be happy for the company. Our congregation's school is required by our licensing board to have an abundant supply of stored water and food stuffs. But that's not really what we want to talk about when I ask "are you ready?" If, when, it happens everyone's answer will pretty much be the same: **not nearly ready enough**. When our Lord returns or when this life ends for each of us (and who knows when that will be), for a great, great, great many people the unspoken and uncomfortable and undeniable truth will be... I am *not* ready. Not ready not because that person wants to live longer (that won't be an option), but because eternity is predicated on Him and that person didn't take Him seriously enough.

Practically all of Luke chapter 12 is in red letters. I have one of those fancy Bibles where all of Jesus' words are in red letters. The idea is that they are supposed to stand out. Imagine, God talking to sinners and what God has to say actually catching our attention. The Bible is God waving His arms, jumping up and down, and saying: "Hey, look over here! Listen to this! You're going to want to know this!" The red letters in the Bible are the publisher taking his yellow highlighter on your behalf and saying, "You might want to take note of *this* as the Fellow who said *these things* is the Son of God, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the incarnate revelation of God (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:4). Your life pretty much depends on what He says, what He does. Ignore Him at your peril." Thank you very much, Mr. Publisher.

The first word in verse 35 is an imperative. Do y'all know what an "imperative" is? Jesus is telling you to do something, it's a command form of speech – not anything close to a suggestion or a bit of advice or simply a word to the wise. And 99% of you purport to be devout followers of the Lord Christ. You know that He died for your sins. You know that He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns throughout this world, that *He is* freedom, *He is* love, *He is* grace and salvation and goodness and truth and life. The One who is all those things, He is telling you to do something. "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning" (Luke 12:35). Watchfulness; that's the upshot of the statement. The Last Day will come abruptly. The time to prepare is now. Christians who delay such preparations are behaving foolishly. The world is blind, covered in darkness. We are not.

Every time that you enter this church you are reminded of this reality. The lamp; the symbol is displayed prominently in our house. It stands opposite the plaque with the Bible, the Scripture, the source of light for believers. In fact, each set of plaques reflect and interpret the design directly on the other side. In front are the two sacraments, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. God brings the glory, the power, the efficacy of Jesus' death and resurrection to us through these means of grace. In the back are the plaques that are devoted to the Office of the Keys, the pastoral office which serves believers in every age by preaching the Word and administering the sacraments as Christ commanded. In the middle is the Word and the lamp. God's Word is what gives light to this house and to your soul. It is His light that shines in this place. It is His light that shines in your soul. How closely He is connected to you! How thoroughly He wants to indwell you!

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). But it doesn't stop there. God forbid that it should stop there. Jesus also said: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). Christ's church is that city on a hill. This congregation is light to the city of Redlands, the Inland Empire. Not because we are so great but because His light shines in us and through us – starting with His Word. We are to keep our lamps burning. It is an imperative. It is *exactly* what Christians do. We *are* preppers. We are, right now, preparing for the Last Day. This Divine Service is a preparation for the day of our death. Confidence, trust, hope, security – God is at work in you, through this Word, to build those character traits, those marks of faith in you that you might profit and then be of use to your neighbor. You are the lamp and God wants you to burn brightly.

We cannot allow unrepentant sin to reign in our lives. Unrepentant sin diminishes the light in our lives and diminishes our preparedness for His return. That is serious. Our treasure is Christ and not the things of this world. To be prepared is to mark and avoid those things that compete with our faith. Worry is one of those things. For a Christian, anxiety can often come unbidden, I understand. Anxiety about the things of this world is to be replaced. Jesus tells us to look at the birds. God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds. Christ's blood announces this truth in symphonic stereo. You mean so much to Him. And look at the fields. How beautiful they are. A mountain meadow, a green hillside in spring, a floral field before the harvest – such beauty and you have seen it, smelled it, luxuriated in it. You are so much more. Clothed in Christ; "If God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!" (Luke 12:28). You are clothed in Christ's righteousness. Do you know what that cost? Do you know what love prompted that sacrifice?

To clothe you, the eternal Son of God, the omnipotent Creator, took up the form of a servant, lowly, meek and small. To clothe you in His Divine Righteousness, the Lord Christ set His face toward Jerusalem and allowed sinful men mock, beat, whip, and crucify Him. He gladly submitted to this – to prepare you for heaven, to give you what you could never achieve, to save and sanctify and surround you with His grace. "For all of you who were baptized into

Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27 – NIV). Do you know what that makes you? That makes you beautiful. Baptism makes you beautiful. He prepares us. For the heavenly wedding banquet, He prepares us. Blood prepares you. Baptism prepares you. Grace prepares you. God’s Word prepares you. Repentance prepares you. The sacrament of the altar prepares you.

Jesus tells us that on the Last Day, when He returns, those whom He finds waiting and watching for Him that He will dress Himself for service and have those servants recline at table and that He will come and serve *them*. Remarkable; the greatest serves the least. Isn’t that what He is doing now? Isn’t it the Lord Himself who gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink? Love and a great attention to your soul leads Him to serve you now, to indwell your being, to enliven you with His resurrection, to refresh your sin-beleaguered heart, to instill in you confidence in His cross, to prepare you for the Last Day, to prepare you for heaven. At Christ the King, we seek His kingdom. Our heart is where our treasure is and our treasure is Christ the King. This is how the Bible ends: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (Revelation 22:20-21).