

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:32-40

“Ready – or not?”

Could you imagine any major event in your life – without having had a time of preparation and planning?

- Your wedding – with no rehearsal or planning or
- When the birth or adoption of a child is due – you get a crib, paint or wallpaper the room, and make a place for the little addition to your life.
- I think you will agree it is a wise practice to prepare and save for retirement – if at all possible?
- During the months of June to December - the southeastern part of the U.S. stays ready for hurricanes, with bottled water, canned goods, batteries, and candles – just in case, right?
- Up in the northern parts of our country - (this brought me great pain to remember this) how many people do you know who own snow shovels or even a snow blower? They might even own a generator.

These preparations are all well and good – but isn't it ironic that we can be so carefully prepared for these important events and not be ready or prepared for the most significant and life impacting event of history – the promised return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. A wise man once said 'you need to dig the well BEFORE you get thirsty!'

There are 260 chapters in the New Testament, and the return of Jesus Christ is mentioned at least 318 times in those chapters. One verse in twenty five mentions the return or the second coming of our Lord. These are just a few of the reminders:

- *“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”* (James 5:7-8)
- *“so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”* (Hebrews 9:28) (for those - the debt has already been paid)
- *“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 1:7-8)

The image of the master of a household, his servants and the important pattern of being ready and watchful when he returns are strengthened by several brief parables and sayings that Jesus gives to us. Each of them supports the theme of being ready for His return and the coming judgment. For example - when the servants are waiting for their master to return from a party, they should stay formally dressed and ready to serve him, and they should keep the lamps lit so that the pathway into the house would be well lighted.

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In the first century a wedding celebration usually could last several days – and you had to be prepared. (Remember the Wedding Feast of Cana, when they ran out of wine – and Jesus was asked by His mother Mary to help - and so He transformed water into wine?) When the master of the house was away – the servants were supposed to keep everything in order – doing all of the things that needed to be done, but the temptation was always there to ‘slack off’ – because it is human nature to think – “Oh, I’ve got time before he comes.” Jesus says that we have to be like the faithful servants who are **always ready!**

- They are up, dressed,
- watching, and waiting
- and their lamps are burning.

One of the things I want to share with you is regarding the image we have when we read about lamps. You might be thinking about candles – but they did not have candles back then. You might be thinking of a Coleman lantern or hurricane lantern. The lamp of the first century was made of clay. (I have included a photo of a clay lantern at the end of this text.) It had a wick and was filled with olive oil. When we read about a lampstand or menorah – they were filled with oil and wicks – not candles! I think it is very important that we become very aware of what we are reading about and seeing images of – that we are getting the right idea. Now when you read in the Scriptures about a lamp – you have a much better idea of what it was.

The prepared and ready servant will be there when the master knocks so that he “*may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.*” (Luke 12:36) There must not be a last minute dash to get things ready! They need to be prepared so that they can respond to his knock immediately. Jesus’ parable speaks of the master being so impressed that he will turn the tables on them and then become their servant and give a celebration in their honor.

It is important for us to know that the Jewish night was divided into four watches.

- The first was from sunset or dark until nine o’clock;
- the second from nine until midnight;
- the third from midnight until three in the morning,
- and the fourth from three until dawn.

No man could watch around the clock, but even if some fell asleep, the servant who was watching would have time to wake up the others so that they would be ready to meet and greet their Master. When the Lord switched the image to that of a thief coming in the night, He introduced a sense of danger. Since thieves don’t make appointments ahead of time, the only way to be ready for the thief’s entry **is to always be ready**. The point is that if you do not want to be surprised, you should be ready at all times for the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus, Himself reminds us of this in His words from Revelation 16:15 “*Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.*”

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With Jesus' speaking of the lamps, the natural inclination is to connect this scripture with Jesus' parable of the 'ten virgins' in Matthew 25. In Jesus' time a lamp was a small piece of pottery closely resembling a gravy-boat and often as small as the palm of the hand. The wick floated on the top of the oil. It is important to understand the importance of the olive oil and the need to have a sufficient supply available. In that parable – there were five of the ten virgins who hoped to celebrate with the bridegroom when he came, but because they ran out of oil, they had to go get some and missed his arrival altogether. Their hopes of celebration were turned to sorrow. So much for being ready!

Jesus said it this way in the Gospel of Mark: *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"* (Mark 13:32-37) Jesus had a lot to say to us about being ready. Jesus intends to reward any believers who faithfully await His return. He wants to encourage those who already believe in Him, to tell them that all the promises that He has given to them will be fulfilled.

On the other hand, when Jesus returns – there will be judgment - for those who have not prepared themselves by accepting Him and being in relationship with Him. Let's face it and let me be very clear - if you do not know Jesus - there will be consequences! Jesus is crystal clear in Matthew 24:42-51 of the consequences and says: *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'my master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* My dear friends – there is no denying that there are consequences!

When Jesus comes again, things will be very different – then it will be the master who will be joyfully waiting on the servants – God's own Son will be the servant of those who are expecting Him – who are ready – and who know Him.

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Being ready does not mean that we get to know when Jesus is coming. So what does it mean to be ready? In the verses immediately following today's Holy Gospel, and especially in verse 45 Jesus describes a servant who is not ready who says: "*My master is taking a long time in coming, and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.*" (Luke 12:45) In other words – the unfaithful servant is living a life as if the master would not return. The very last thing on that person's mind is salvation, the last thing on their mind is "who is Jesus Christ," the last thing on that person's mind is thinking that there are any consequences to sin – just as we see in our culture today. He thinks that he can use and abuse his power as much as he wants, because no one will hold him accountable. Jesus continues: "*The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.*" (Luke 12:46) Jesus is so very clear –

- if you do not believe in Him,
- if you do not trust in Him,
- if you do not look to Him for salvation - as "*the Way, the Truth, and the Life – for no one comes to the Father, but through Him*" (John 14:6)
- then you are not ready!

For those who are not ready – I am afraid that Jesus' second coming will be quite an unpleasant surprise!

The servant who is ready is already a member of the shepherds' "little flock" and whose mind is not always on earthly things - as Jesus says God "*your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32) **We are to be in this world, but not of it.** As Jesus said: "*for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Luke 12:34)

- If it is stuff you want – then stuff you will get – if it is Jesus Christ and eternal life that you live for – then indeed that will be your reward!
- The servant who is ready is the one who always does what his master entrusted him to do. Jesus said, "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.*" (Luke 12:42-44) This faithful servant does not have to make any special preparations – he is always ready. He does not need to know the time of his master's arrival. He is ready anyway – and that is how Jesus encourages us to live our lives.

I want to close with the very last recorded words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which can be found in the Book of Revelation. Jesus says: "**Yes, I am coming soon.**" (Revelation 22:20) I think it is clear that the return of our Lord Jesus Christ should be on all of our hearts and our minds – which faithfully leads us to work for and desire to BE READY! Jesus asked this question in Luke 18 "**When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?**" (Luke 18:8) If you know Jesus Christ, then you are ready!

