

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:32-40

***“Available and Ready”***

In today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus gives His followers three pretty clear instructions to follow in order to be ready for when the Lord comes back. The first instruction is for us to be available for Him. Available means “able to be used or obtained, or spoken to or consulted.” Let's face it - we need to be “available” for whatever comes our way – whatever the Lord has prepared for us to do or to deal with. There are many reasons that unprepared people have their spirituality virtually cave in or collapse.

Being available also means needing to be dressed and be ready for action. Imagine how foolish it would be for a soldier to go out in the battlefield without combat gear- no provisions, no weapons, and no navigational tools. How about this being “pre-season football” and getting ready for the Trojans. They played on a Friday night recently and those lights will be going strong pretty soon. Think about it - how about a football player going on the field without helmet and pads. Being prepared is very important or a hockey player with no skates, no pads and no stick – totally defenseless? From my experience as a chaplain for the Douglas Police Department – an officer without their protective vest, weapon, and radio they are totally unprepared for service. The Lord, through St. Paul in Ephesians 6:13-17 instructs us to *“put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

God has already given us His spiritual armor; and our job is to be aware of the equipment he has provided for us and to ask Him to dress us in it each and every day. The truth is that Satan wants to destroy us, so we've got to be focused on the battle and not let our passion fade.

Jesus' second instruction is for us to wait patiently for His return. He is coming back – He said so! God's timing is something that is hard for most of us to understand and even harder for some to accept. We have to admit that we live in an instant generation – just add water and you get hot oatmeal! Throw it in the microwave and you get instant pizza –you can even microwave a four-course meal. Viola! When your beloved is at a meeting – you have dinner. I know. Let's face it - if we have to wait – we probably will pass up a whole bunch of opportunities.

The Chinese bamboo tree when seeds are planted, I find this fascinating, nothing happens until 5 years later, when in a period of about six weeks, the Chinese bamboo trees grow roughly ninety feet! That is from home to first base – and now you can put it in perspective. The question is – did it grown ninety feet in six weeks or did it grow ninety feet in five years? The

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answer is – five years – it took that long for the seeds to break open and start to germinate, because if it had not been tended to, watered and fertilized – there would have not been a bamboo tree.

We are all faced with situations in our lives that we want instant results, instant answers, and God does not work that way. Every prayer, as I mentioned last week, is answered by Him – sometimes it is yes, sometimes it is no, but sometimes the answer is – not right now - wait! It is the times when we are impatient and try to force God's hand – where we run into some major disappointments. We heard all about Abram today – the faithful friend of God. In today's Old Testament reading – we read where God make a covenant with Abraham. In this covenant – God promised Abram and Sarai an heir. He told Abram "*Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.*" Then he said to him, "*So shall your offspring be.*" (Genesis 15:5) We can read in the chapter 16 that Abram and Sarai were impatient and could not wait for God to bless them – instead they took things into their own hands – and used Hagar, what was their Egyptian servant as a surrogate. And so Ishmael was born, but he was not the one that God promised. God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah, as a sign that He was in the midst of all of this. Abram means "high father" and God changed it to Abraham which means "father of a multitude." Sarai means "my princess," but Sarah means "mother of nations." God was laying out His plan for His family to grow – in His timing. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, in God's timing, not Abraham's, Isaac, the promised heir would be born, and from his line would come the nations of Israel. The children of Ishmael – the Ishmaelites – would later be at odds with the Israelites – and still are today. You have the Israelites in the Land and you have the Ishmaelites who are claiming the Land for themselves. They take many names – Arabs, Palestinians, but who does it belong to? Ultimately God – and God gave it to Israel.

I want to suggest to you that it is so important to listen to God, to be in His Word – it is amazing – we need to await His instructions for our lives – and to be ready to be absolutely amazed by what He will do in our lives. Especially – when He comes again in Glory! To not wait patiently is to take things into our own hands - to be like Abraham and Sarah. We have to wait upon the Lord. Remember what I said last week – we need to be looking for His fingerprints in our lives.

Jesus final instruction to us in this Gospel is for us to keep watching. To watch means to stay awake intentionally. The act of keeping awake is to guard, protect and to attend, and a state of alert and continuous attention. The great English writer - William Shakespeare said, "we are so much influenced by the world because of unawareness and in not staying to keep in watch." Jesus is not telling us to stay up late and over caffeinate ourselves until the dawn – or to somehow defy the physical limitations that have been put upon our bodies. Instead – Jesus is telling each one of us to stand guard, to protect the faith once given to us, and to let nothing dilute the power of the Word of God, to not allow God's intentions for His people to be changed. There is nothing in this Book that is erasable or changeable. It is what it is and it is a

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gift from God. We can't let His intentions be changed – and to not modify or seek “new and profound interpretations” of the Holy Bible that are more suitable to our lifestyle. We are not to try and sculpt our own comfort zone – dictated by our desires and the desires of today's culture. While on our “watch” we have to be ready – to defend against those who find Jesus as something other than the Only Son of God! “Oh he is a great teacher, a prophet” – NO – He is the Son of God. We have been given such a rich treasure – God's Holy Word – both written and Incarnate. Is your heart all about this treasure - or the treasures of this world; the treasure of this culture? Are we good stewards of everything that God has given us – especially His Word – and the heritage that goes with it? Or are we so in love with this world – and the things of it – that we would be so preoccupied with stuff that we would not be ready when the Lord comes again. “God – can you just hold on a minute? I have just two more things to do!” It is not going to work that way. Jesus said in Luke 12:40, “*You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*” And in Matthew 24:36 “*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*”

Be on your guard – prepare each day – in grateful obedience to God– with the intention that today could be the day – and now could be the hour.

You know me and music – I have loved music from the time I was a little one, and of course our Contemporary Christian Oldies Show, after spending 40 something years playing rock music, and now Christian music. There is an award-winning Christian band called Petra, and I have been blessed to personally know many of the members of the band. The man who founded the group, and had written most of their many hit songs is Bob Hartman. Bob and the lead singer, John Schlitt are amazing men of God and I had them to St. Bart's several times during my nine years there. In conversations with Bob, most of the hit songs by Petra, and there are many, are based on Holy Scripture.

Please listen to these words from Holy Scripture:

Matthew 9:37-38 “*Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*”

Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2 “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

Those Scripture verses are the very inspiration for a song, written by Bob Hartman, and recorded by Petra– here's just a portion:

*I am available, I will go when you say go  
I am available, I will stop when you say no*

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*My whole life was incomplete till I laid it at Your feet*

*So use me as You will, I am available*

(I Am Available) –

Words and music by Bob Hartman. Based on Matthew 9:37-38 and Romans 12:1

And then these two Scriptures:

1 Peter 3:15 *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*

2 Timothy 4:2 *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.”*

Both Peter and Paul’s words were enough to inspire Bob to write this song called “Ready, Willing and Able.”

*To advance the light and defend the right – Ready, willing and able.*

*Lifting up the cross to the waiting lost – Ready to serve and willing to go*

*Able to stand against the foe – Ready, willing and able!*

*He’s already given us all that we need – with love in our message and hope in our creed*

*When Yahweh is for us and faith is our stay – no power below us can stand in our way.*

(Ready Willing and Able)

Words and music by Bob Hartman. Based on 1 Peter 3:15 and 2 Timothy 4:2

Can you see what I mean? These songs and the many others that Bob has written and Petra has recorded have been inspired by God’s Holy Word – to encourage us and to strengthen us in our daily walk with the Lord.

I am not asking you to go out and listen to a lot of Contemporary Christian Music – if that is not your thing, but there is a lot of music out there: holy music, hymns – that can inspire us in such a tremendous way.

Think about Jesus’ three instructions to us in today’s Holy Gospel – let me ask you:

- Are you ready?
- Are you prepared for the next thing that Jesus has for you?
- Are you ready, willing and able?