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August 8, 2010

Luke 12:32-40

A while back someone came to my door. It was early. I wasn't dressed yet. My hair wasn't combed.

I didn't want to answer the door, but they persisted. It seemed important. So I opened the door a crack and peeked out.

If it had been someone from Publishers Clearing House offering me a million dollars I would have made a pretty picture with my hair all a mess and in my pajamas!

This morning's passage from the gospel according to Luke is a series of parables telling us to be ready---be ready for Jesus when he comes.

He will come like a knock on the door before you are dressed.

He will come like your boss who comes and catches you playing Mafia Wars or Solitaire on your computer or sending a text message to your best friend.

He will come like a burglar trying to break into your house in the middle of the night.

He will come down the stairs in the dark and you better leave a light on so he won't fall and break his foot!!

I don't know how many of you drive down the 805 on your way here, but I do. There's a billboard beside the freeway that reads, "Jesus is about to return! BE READY!!" The picture shows a man on his knees with his arms raised toward a bright light.

I have heard a number of people say that we are in the End Times, that Jesus is coming any time now. They say the earthquakes and the wars and other things that are happening are sure signs of the Second Coming.

And they may be right. But people have been predicting the Second Coming for a long time now. About 2000 years, in fact.

People have been expecting Christ to return pretty much ever since he ascended into heaven, so it's no wonder that we don't know how to read the signs of the times any more than the people Jesus was talking to!

After all, there have been periods of earthquakes and great storms and wars and conflict throughout all of history. What makes this time any different?

Some people are convinced that we are in the End Times. Other people have come to the conclusion that the Second Coming is a more personal event---that Jesus comes again and again in our hearts and lives, and that it won't be an apocalypse at all.

To be honest with you, some days I find myself praying for the Second Coming to happen already. Other days I am grateful that Christ has come to me once again.

No matter what I believe at any given time, I never want to even try to figure out when he will return. Because I would most likely be wrong. Jesus told us that no one can know the day or the hour, after all.

And when it comes right down to it, I am not sure trying to figure out when to expect him is important at all!

Because in today's passage we hear that we need to be ready, that Christ will come when we least expect it, even if we think we have it all analyzed and predicted!

If we never see the Second Coming, with Christ coming back to earth in the clouds, the way we read in scripture, even if we could know somehow for a fact that it will never happen in our lifetimes, we still need to be ready.

So the more relevant question is, how do we stay ready? It's not possible to be reading the Bible all the time, or worship all the time, or stay on our knees all the time, like that billboard beside the 805 shows.

We still need to work, to eat, to sleep, to go to school, to play with our kids and spend time with our friends, and all the normal everyday stuff.

So staying ready is a bit of a challenge.

The series of passages from the Gospel according to Luke that I have been preaching from has been talking a lot about the Kingdom of God, and about our relationship with God.

Last week we heard the words of Jesus telling us to store up treasure in heaven, and about depending on God the way that the birds and the lilies of the field do.

And then today we hear Jesus talking about staying ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect.

I don't think Jesus changes the subject abruptly. I think that he has a train of thought going that we need to follow.

And so I think that being ready is not a passive, on your knees, kind of thing. I think it's an active way of living, because he has been talking about things to do---building the Kingdom of God, storing up treasure in heaven---

all while depending on God to take care of us and not becoming slaves to worry and anxiety.

Some people in the past, believing that Christ's return was imminent, have sold their homes and all their possessions and gone to live on a mountain, sitting and waiting.

Now, it's true that Jesus said to sell all your possessions, but that directive was not followed by "Go live in the woods." It was followed by "Give alms"---give to charity, do acts of kindness, give your time and your love.

So first I hear, "Seek first God's kingdom and strive for righteousness." Next I hear, "Don't worry about food or clothing, but depend on God." And then I hear "Store up treasure in heaven."

And now I hear, "Be ready."



So I have to think that all of that goes together, that the first three ideas lead up to being ready.

So being ready follows from seeking God's reign and striving to live the way God wants us to live, obedient and good.

If we are anxious and worried about basic necessities, then our thoughts and efforts are distracted from living the lives that God intended us to have.

Most of all, I believe that storing up treasure in heaven is the way to be ready.

Storing up treasure in heaven by praying, by steeping ourselves in scripture, by loving God and loving neighbor in very real and practical ways---by working to bring God's kingdom here on earth---within us and among us.

Jesus Christ might return this afternoon and I do want to be ready, but I will tell you honestly that what is more important to me than sitting and waiting for that to happen is to be living intentionally.

The way for us to be ready is to make the choices that will lead us closer to being the people that God intends us to be, the people that God had in mind when we were created,

not the people that we have become because of the expectations of the world, the people that we are because of bad choices, because of all the times and all the ways that we have failed to believe that we are beloved children of God.

The sins of the world have affected and infected us, keeping us apart from the heart of God, keeping us from being everything that God wants us to be.

And the way to be ready is to do our best to reverse that, to be God's beloved children, living without anxiety, trusting that God will take care of our needs.

In today's passage we heard something very important---

"Do not fear, little flock. It is God's pleasure to give you the kingdom."

We don't have to worry that somehow we need to coerce or bribe God to let us into heaven. He wants to give us the kingdom!

What we have to do is accept it. And what we have to do to be ready is open our hearts and our arms to receive the gift of grace which is Christ himself.

When we believe that God loves us and cares for us and stands ready and willing to give us the kingdom, then we are ready.

When we are ready, then we spending our time with Christ, praying and reading and being the Body of Christ in the world by loving God and neighbor, by being obedient to God and serving the needs of those around us.

What if, when I opened my door a crack that early morning, still in my pajamas with my hair uncombed---what if it had been Jesus Christ at the door??

Would I have given another thought to the fact that I wasn't dressed and washed and well-groomed?

What do you think?

I think that no matter how I look

Jesus Christ comes to me again and again, taking care of me, speaking an encouraging word to me, guiding me, loving me, and helping me.

He is there for you, too. All you have to do is open the door when he knocks. All you have to do is listen when you read scripture and when you pray.

All you have to do is be the Body of Christ in the world, and open your heart to what God is calling you to do and to be.

Christ is knocking at the door. Will you ignore him because you're not dressed and your hair is uncombed?

Be ready! Open the door!