

Pentecost 9C 07 August 2022
Luke 12:32-40
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
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Grace, peace, and comfort to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

It's intuitive to treat Jesus' teaching today back to front, and I'll focus on three things that Jesus says: *'be like those who are waiting for their master to return'*, *'be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour'*, and with particular emphasis on, *'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'* Let's pray:

Waiting. Waiting for the traffic lights to change at Gepps Cross. Waiting in the checkout line to pay for groceries. Sitting in the waiting room at the doctor's surgery. Waiting for a lift to elevate us to the wonders of retail therapy at Myer. One reality of life is waiting; waiting for someone to show up, for something to happen, for things to change. And most of us don't like waiting. How many times have you said out of exasperation or impatience, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"? Lots of buttons are pushed – including ours.

Sometimes it seems like life is nothing more than waiting. As children, we can't wait to grow up and Christmas never comes fast enough. As adults, we wait for that special someone who will make our life complete, a promotion, retirement. Some people wait for a diagnosis, others for a cure. Some wait for the day the pain will stop and the grief will end. Others wait for their prayers to be answered. Many of us wait for that day when we'll have enough time, money, freedom, and the day we'll live happily ever after.

And if we were to reflect on our waiting, we'd realise that we generally don't wait in the present. We're often drawn into either the past or the future. The great tragedy with this is that we lose the present moment. That's what makes waiting so painful and difficult.

Waiting in the future brings fear and anxiety about what will happen. Fear of the unknown and lack of control haunt us. Waiting in the past brings sadness, anger, or guilt about things that have happened, or things left undone. As difficult as our present circumstances may be, that's the only place where we're fully alive. The present is the only place we can truly experience God.

When we move out of the present, we deny life. We desecrate the sacredness of the present moment. We miss the gift of God's kingdom.

Everyone, everywhere, in every age, waits. Jesus tells the crowd, "Be like those who are waiting for their master to return." But Jesus is telling them to do something active.

This isn't simply about passing time. It's about being present. Jesus sees waiting as an act of faithfulness; 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1). Today's gospel doesn't describe an absent God who left us 2000 years ago, and for whom we wait in the future.

Jesus is teaching us how and where to wait; inviting us to be present to the One who is always present. He's inviting us to listen for the knock, to watch, and to be alert. He's inviting us to be present to the reality of God in each other, in the world, and in ourselves. This is the God who is present in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, especially in our waiting.

Hence, Jesus says, "Be dressed for action. Something is going on right now. Right here. And I want you to be a part of it. Come participate. For it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This is for you. Have your lamps lit. There's something to see. Move out of the darkness. Come into the light. See what's right in front of you, what's all around you, and what's within you. For the Father wants you to have the kingdom."

"Be alert," Jesus commands. Not as a threat of punishment; rather, an invitation to be blessed. Blessed are those whom he finds alert. This isn't Jesus just inviting us to be awake, ready, watchful. Jesus is calling us to be and remain fully alive. Blessing and life are synonymous in God's kingdom. It's as though Jesus is saying to us, "Be alert, be blessed, and I will come and serve you the bread of life and the cup of salvation."

All of this happens at an unexpected hour. Like a thief in the night the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. And I know what's on everyone's mind: "When is the unexpected hour?" Friends, the unexpected hour is always right here, right now.

The unexpected hour is the hour spent in the hospital waiting room; the hour sitting next to the phone waiting for news of a loved one; the hour praying for a miracle; the hour in which we wait for clarity and a way forward; the hour waiting for the grief to end and life to return to normal; the hour in which it seems as if nothing's happening. The unexpected hour is the hardest hour, but it's also the hour in which Jesus is ready with words of reassurance: *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

In our hardest hour, we see just how kind and tender Jesus is towards us! He comes down from his throne at the right hand of the Father and draws us, his chosen and beloved near to him. He opens his heart to us to reveal Father's love for us. He withholds nothing that's important for our well-being.

Jesus abides with us as a friend, an elder brother, a loving Father. Do you realise how much he thinks of us, how deeply he sympathises with us, how far he is from despising us? The mighty and powerful may sneer at the faithful who put their hope in Jesus; not so our divine Master. Though we may be a little flock, Jesus looks upon us fondly and says comfortingly, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Indeed, we are a little flock and as such, Jesus takes upon himself the office of a shepherd. He guarantees us food, comfort, and protection. And he speaks of us as being "little", not condescendingly, but with compassion and endearment. Like calling those we love by little names. The tone of the text suggests that our Saviour dwells on the littleness of those he loves with fondness and gentleness.

There's nothing that or no one who, rivals Jesus' strong affection for us. Like a doting mother cooing to her new-born baby, Jesus says to us, "Never mind how few or despised you may be, your weakness gives you a warmer place in my heart and makes me draw you more closely to my bosom. Hush, hush, be still, fear not, little flock."

Saints, we have every reason to be confident in the unexpected hour. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "It is **my** Father's good pleasure," but says more sweetly, "It is **your** Father's good pleasure." Here, our beloved Jesus identifies the special, intimate relation he shares with us. "It is your Father's good pleasure." And your Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What Jesus does here is deeply intimate. He calls himself our Brother. If his Father is our Father, then Jesus must be our Brother. We are his kinfolk. Jesus levels the playing field by simultaneously lifting us up to himself while coming down to us. “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Isn’t it exhilarating to be on such friendly terms with the blessed Lord of life that we’re able to say with John, ‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14)?

And even though we might envy Jesus’ first disciples, we’re blessed with an even greater privilege. Jesus also said, ‘Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you’ (John 16:7). It’s better for us that Jesus went in order that we might enjoy the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, not only to dwell with us, but also to be in us. I pray that you realise and enjoy the Comforter’s presence at this time! To be without the bodily presence of the Lord, and without the spiritual presence of the Holy Ghost would be a double loss. Give praise to God that his Holy Spirit dwells in us, and shall be with us forever.

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, ensures our ongoing communion with God. God incarnate has gone from us, but has left the words of his comfort to cheer us. In the power of the Holy Spirit, then, let’s be consoled in our darkest, unexpected hour with Jesus’ words, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

We are a little flock with a Great Shepherd; there are great fears, but still, even greater consolation, in Christ.

Remember, you are numbered among Christ’s sheep! Though the flock may be little; the Good Shepherd is Almighty. Herd together little ones of the Lord; his heritage is your inheritance for, ‘It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.’ Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.