

People Get Ready

Luke 12:35-40; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

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Church of the New Covenant

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“People Get Ready”, by Curtis Mayfield

People get ready	There ain't no room
There's a train a-coming	For the hopeless sinner
You don't need no baggage	Who would hurt all mankind
You just get on board	Just to save his own
All you need is faith	Have pity on those
To hear the diesels humming	Whose chances are thinner
Don't need no ticket	Cause there's no hiding place
You just thank the Lord	'Gainst the kingdom's throne

Today's Gospel is telling us: People Get Ready!

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;”

“Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes;”

“if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming,”

“You must be ready.”

“Jesus is coming – look busy!”

Phrases like these are usually associated with judgment: at the end of life, at the end of time.

Some of the best known depictions of this are the cataclysmic images in Revelation.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. (1:7)

We see the scroll of the judgment with its seven ominous seals; the seven angels of the heavenly council, who blow the seven trumpets of destruction and pour out the seven bowls of doom. The sun, the moon, and the stars will all be darkened. The entire earth will be shaken with lightning strikes and massive earthquakes. Plagues of locusts and disease – far worse than anything Egypt endured in the day of Moses – will cover the earth. Wars will break out everywhere, and all people will quiver in terror.

People – Get ready!

Similar warnings occur in the gospels. Jesus himself says:

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” (Lk 21:25-27)

People – Get ready!

All of this lends some perspective to the passage we encountered last week, which immediately precedes today’s: “Sell your possessions and give alms.” Jesus is instructing all who would follow him to lighten their load. Instead of building bigger barns and storing up stuff, they should be “dressed for action and have [their] lamps lit.”

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We must keep in mind, as we wrestle with these episodes in Luke, that they have been launched by verse 9:51: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus is pressing hard toward Jerusalem. There is very little time left before his head-on encounter with death and evil, and he is living under a terrible urgency. Therefore, he is telling everyone who is following him to be constantly ready to pick up and go.

He is also counseling them about the days ahead, the days following his death and his resurrection, when they will be carrying on his work after his departure, and in anticipation of his return.

People get ready.

Those “days ahead” soon became years; then hundreds of years; now thousands. It is very difficult to stay on high alert for more than a few days, much less thousands of years.

The question of the end-time will not yield a resolution until it comes, whether that is in five billion years (the expected life of the Sun) or five minutes. In the mean time we have to live, well, *in the mean time*.

Using the imagery of surprise -- the thief and the master who come at unexpected times -- Jesus is telling us that *in the mean time* he will show up at unexpected times and in unexpected opportunities -- and he will expect us to be ready to respond.

Our congregation is at a very important juncture in its life. Our future is quite uncertain. It is as if we have been walking along a familiar pathway and suddenly a huge cloud has rolled up on the ground right in front of us. We are all standing here with one foot lifted, preparing to take the next step. We can't keep it lifted indefinitely. If we do, we'll surely fall over. If we put it down beside the other foot, we will only stand still. If we put it forward, into the cloud, we have no idea what sort of pathway we will be stepping onto.

If we are going to step into that future, we are going to have to be ready for a few surprises. We are going to have to be dressed for action.

We are also going to have to have our lamps lit: lamps of faith. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews calls this “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” We hope for a lot, here at Church of the New Covenant. We hope we can attract new members. We hope we can build a good youth program. We hope we can continue to pursue meaningful ministries in service to Christ and our neighbor.

Some conviction is required of us as well, “the conviction of things not seen.” We have to get ready for something we cannot yet know. It will probably come when we least expect it, like a thief in the night.

This *conviction* is going to require something from us, something like what was asked of Abraham and Sarah, whom the writer of Hebrews holds up as having the kind of faith God needs us to have as we take our next steps.

They were asked to let go of everything they had known in their past: their tribe, their land, and the security they had built for themselves there.

There is an old joke that is told about them: Someone asked Abraham, "Where you goin'?", "I dunno;" "What are you gonna to do there?" , "I dunno;" "Why you goin'?" "I dunno." They had to have the conviction of things not seen.

Here is parable which may give us some insight into what we need to do. It comes from a book called *Illusions* by Richard Bach.

Once there lived a village of creatures along the bottom of a great crystal river. The current of the river swept silently over them all -- young and old, rich and poor, good and evil, the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self.

Each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, "I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. "

The other creatures laughed and said, "Fool! Let go, and that current you worship will throw you tumbled and smashed across the rocks, and you will die!"

But the one heeded them not, and taking a breath he let go, and at once was tumbled and crashed by the current against the rocks. Yet in time, as the creature refused again and again to cling to any familiar place, the current lifted him free from the bottom. He sailed swiftly along and was bruised and hurt no more.

There is a Spirit at work that wants to transform our way of living. But that miracle will never occur if we cling to the nooks and crannies that we believe to be our safety. What we are being asked to do is to let go.

This is a lot like the natural birth process. The infant is nestled and nourished in the safety and darkness of the mother's womb. But in order for

him or her to live the life that has been given, the baby has to let go of that safety and be carried by the waters of birth into a world hitherto unimagined. There the light will hurt the eyes. There the first breath of air will hurt the lungs. Out there the child will be tumbled and occasionally smash into things. And out there the child will run after butterflies and stand in awe of the waves of the sea. Out there the child will thrill in its loves and weep after its losses. In its new life the child will truly and fully live, otherwise it will surely perish.

We are called to let go of whatever it is that holds us back. Barbara Brown Taylor said this about Abraham and Sarah, when they let go of their old roots and allowed God to carry them off to a new land. She said, When the wind of the Spirit came up behind them, "They became kites!"

We are called to let go of our familiar ways, our old ideas. We are called upon to allow the Wind of God's Spirit to carry us soaring and swirling into the blessed uncertainty of what lies ahead.

We hear the sound of the Wind.

People, get ready!