

Genesis 15:1-6
Psalm 33:12-22
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

We've probably all had that experience of being caught off guard.....the boss appears in the office on a day that we thought the boss was on vacation; we answer a knock at the door and discover it's a long lost friend who has decided to drop in for a visit and the house is a mess; we've made a quick trip to the grocery store in our gardening gear and look a mess from head to toe and end up running into half a dozen people we know but rarely see. It happens. We aren't always prepared. We aren't always at our best.

But Jesus' message this morning is about being prepared. He says, "Blessed are those slaves that the master finds alert when he comes." But Jesus knows that we are only human. We can't stay awake 24/7. Out of each day, we must sleep because if we don't we will begin to unravel fast. We won't be able to function. Jesus is in a human body. He, too, needs to sleep, so he knows that we are not going to be able to be awake all the time. So what is he talking about?

To help us figure that out, let's take a look at the passage that comes right before this one. It is a passage that is probably familiar to you. It is the reassurance of God's providence to his whole creation. God is not a distance force that simply created once and then stood back to let things unfold as they will. God is a present power that continuously creates and we, his children, are co-creators with God. But sometimes we get worried.

In the world we live in, there is plenty to be worried about. There are people who die simply because they don't have enough food. There are wars going on that we cannot stop. There are people in positions of power and influence who are not nurturing a relationship with God. There are people without homes and people without jobs. There are people with hate in their hearts and they send it out into the environment around them with a profound effect on others. There are people who have gotten caught up in drug addiction and can't find a way out. There is injustice among people when we long for justice for everyone.

But the passage just before the one we heard this morning reminds us of God's continued participation in the world He continues to create. Jesus tells us not to worry.....that God provides for the birds in the air who do no work and he adorns the lilies of the field more gloriously than anything Solomon ever wore. Jesus reminds us that God knows that we need food to eat and clothes to wear. And Jesus assures us that if God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies, God will surely feed and clothe us because we are far more valuable to God than the birds and the lilies. So Jesus encourages us to have faith.

And Jesus encourages us to strive for the kingdom of God. He tells us that it gives God great pleasure to give us the kingdom and those listening to Jesus know that Jesus himself is providing a glimpse of the kingdom to us. So the kingdom is not just about what will happen when our earthly bodies die. The

kingdom is about what is happening to us now.....in real time. Today. And Jesus encourages us to travel lightly through this life so as not to get weighed down. It occurred to me once that my idea of hell was to be required to drag all of my earthly belongings with me through all eternity. Every time that thought occurs to me it is always a good motivator to get me busy purging things from my home.

But Jesus also tells us to make a purse for ourselves.....one that won't wear out.....that purse is an unfailing treasure in heaven. So what do you suppose that purse holds? What is it that won't wear out? What is it that no moth can destroy and no thief can take? Could it be our earthly experiences? Could it be all the relationships that we make? Could it be the memory of all the glimpses of the kingdom of God that we enjoyed in this life? Could it be all the times that we were aware of God's presence in our lives? Could it be all the times we gave love and all the times we experienced love? Could it be the memories of all the times our hearts were broken and then were mended? What's our treasure? What is it that is most important to us? Where do we spend the precious time we have that stores up treasure in heaven for us?

Do not worry, Jesus says. Do not be afraid. So much of the time we think about the return of Jesus as a time to be afraid. We will stand in judgement on the last day and for many of us that's a pretty scary thought. It creates in us the same anxiety that a small child has.....one who knows that he has thoroughly messed up the day.....he's done all kinds of things that are bad and that are wrong.....and what he hears from his mother is, "Just wait 'til your father gets home!" How many of us have spent the rest of the day in dread waiting for our fathers to come home and pronounce judgement on us?

But that's not the kind of father Jesus is telling us about. We know that we have messed up. We know that we have done things wrong. We know that we've done the things we shouldn't do and we haven't done the things we should do and we're basically a mess! What's going to happen when Jesus returns? What's going to happen when we stand before our Father? Jesus tells us in this passage.

Jesus says "blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them". This doesn't sound like anything that any of us should dread. But what does it mean that we must be found alert because we've already realized that we can't stay awake 24/7.

Perhaps being alert involves cultivating our awareness of God in all aspects of our lives. Perhaps what's required of us in terms of preparation is attention to God in this life. Lots of attention to God. Perhaps it is in spending time with God in prayer. Perhaps it is in talking about God with other believers. Perhaps it is talking about God to those who don't believe. Perhaps it is reading the Bible and also reading all the footnotes in a study Bible that tell us what the passages mean. Perhaps it is simply continuously reminding ourselves of the presence of God in creation and in every aspect of our daily lives. There is nothing about us that is menial or trivial or boring to God. He wants to hear from us about all of it. Being alert and being prepared is about keeping God front and center in our conscious awareness. And when God comes.....as he does on many occasions.....we can recognize him because we have been nurturing our relationship with him.

I had lunch the other day with a new friend. She and I met several years ago as Blue Angels Moms, but we saw each other only briefly at shows and never had a chance to really get to know one another, so we decided to have lunch together and get better acquainted. She is a devout Catholic and has spent her life learning about Christ, and nurturing her relationship with God and being on the lookout for the Holy Spirit.

She told me about an experience she had not too long ago when her brother was in the hospital and near death. She was aware that he was being over-medicated.....perhaps to hasten his death. His grown children were present. His wife was present. There were medical personnel there and as she spoke with him she knew that what was happening was not right for him, but she felt in a quandary about what to do. She said she asked her brother what he wanted to do and he said he wanted to go home. In an instant, in a voice that was neither panicked not dictatorial, but one that was full of authority, she began asking questions. Could he be taken off the medication? Could his grown children take family leave to care for him at home? Could his needs be otherwise met if he was not in the hospital? The answers to all of these questions was, "Yes." So her brother went home. He lived 5 more weeks and he was surrounded by his family and he was aware of all that was going on around him and his last few weeks on earth were among the happiest of his life. He died peacefully and my friend knew that the voice of authority that had come out of her mouth was the work of the Holy Spirit, not her. She had been preparing herself all her life to be ready when God arrived. And He did. And she was. She was open enough to God, had enough faith in God, had enough preparation in her life to allow the Holy Spirit to use her in this one critical moment in her brother's life. She confessed to me that she didn't think she would ever have been able to figure out what to do on her own. And that if she had tried to speak to the family on own she would probably have made all of them mad. But none of that happened. And when God arrived and found her alert and ready, he set about serving her and her brother as only God can. God took care of all of them.

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And we don't have to wait for the kingdom until our earthly bodies die. God is prepared to give us the kingdom now in this life. We just have to be prepared to recognize God and to allow him to take care of us. This passage is not about us and whether or not we are 'good.' It is about God and God's desire to take care of us and to provide us with the kingdom. We need to keep God in the center of our consciousness and we need never worry or dread about what will happen when our Father comes home.

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.