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St. Luke 12:32-40
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St. George's Bolton
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Preppers!

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ...You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Being prepared used to be a slogan for the Boy Scouts. Today it is becoming a quiet obsession on the part of many to prepare themselves for come what may. We worry about the unexpected and the unexpected hour.

We live in fear-driven times. Many are consumed with concern about natural disasters and global climate change. The weather is becoming more violent if you hadn't noticed, and those who have are scrambling behind the scenes to prepare for the coming cataclysm.

Fear also extends to social disorder, including everything from crime to violence to the terrorist threat. Fear can drive us to be prepared. The question is, how do you go about being prepared?

Jesus strongly pushes his hearers in the Gospel this morning to be prepared. He warns that God will return at an hour you do not expect, and hopefully God will find you ready and prepared to go with him. There is no saying, *can you wait a minute?* when God comes calling on you, or the opportunity to go with God may disappear into the mist of time.

I am a minor *prepper*, especially when it comes to the threat of dangerous weather. I have prepared a "BUG-Out Bag" which I have shown off during a previous sermon. Having such a bag can give me a false sense of security, as though I am truly ready for come what may. Half the battle is learning to expect the unexpected. Trouble is, I don't bring that bag with me everywhere I go, and the weather can change during the day such that I might need the bag, and there it is, on a closet shelf back home, not doing anyone any good. The point of many of Jesus' teachings is to tell us that no matter how well you think you are prepared, life can surprise you. Being prepared makes us feel as though we are in control of things, when really, it is God that is always in control. Evidence: the predicted "dangerous" thunderstorms yesterday, which ended up being a no-show.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be prepared according to his teaching. Remember the story of the ten bridesmaids from Matthew chapter 25 [25:1-13]? *"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake*

therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." So one must conclude from this parable that it is wise to be prepared and have extra oil for your lamps. It would not be unwise for us also to be prepared for any emergency, come what may. Knowing that it was likely the groom would come at night, it made sense to some of the bridesmaids to be prepared by having the oil for their lamps on hand. This infers that we keep our eye on what is our first priority and prepare ourselves to meet the challenges of what is truly important in life. Problem is, it is very easy to get distracted.

Being prepared can make a difference. And we ought to be prepared for the temporal challenges which can cause us anxiety. Being prepared can lift the pall of worry when we are unprepared for literal storms in life, as well as the other storms of life like being laid off from work or needing an expensive repair to your car or home. It is not unwise to save for a rainy day or for retirement. It is helpful to have resources to fall back upon when times get tough. Such a purse may prevent you from falling further into deep trouble when those bad times arise. Being prepared for bad weather and having escape routes which you can rely upon is also prudent.

The Mormon Church quietly has a very detailed preparation plan, and members are expected to be prepared for emergencies by stocking up on non-perishable food and other items. Across the country, Mormons have regional supply warehouses set aside for this purpose to aid their members in being prepared. In a recent book by Ted Koppel, entitled *Lights Out*, the author suggested that the Mormon Church was better prepared for calamities than the U.S. Government and that FEMA could take a lesson in being prepared from them. So Churches can do something right when it

comes to preparations. I guess you might call all of us "Preppers" because of Jesus' teachings.

While it is prudent to be prepared for temporal calamities, Jesus goes to great lengths in his teachings to urge his followers to be prepared, but for *what* one might ask? And the simplest answer is for the return of the Holy One: God. This return might happen at the end of time. This return will happen at the end of your mortal life. And perhaps, the return might take place anywhere in your life for a mid-course correction, particularly when you have wandered astray and are totally lost. Many call this a "come to Jesus" moment. Indeed, God is always beckoning to us to return home to be with God, so the suggestion is to turn about and start looking for the way back. Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you, we are told.

So that leaves us with the question, *how is one spiritually prepared for come what may, for the unexpected?*

To get at that, think about if this were the last day of your life on this earth, what are the loose ends you would like to tie up? What are the true priorities and things you have left undone that ought to be done, as the old general confession from the Book of Common Prayer used to suggest?

This leads me to say, that the spiritual priorities for preparation run something like this:

- **Confessing our sins**, our wrongs against others, finally telling the truth and resolving the wounds of the past, where that is possible. As AA wisely teaches, truly making amends and then moving on with your life.
- Reconnecting with God through **daily prayer**, and asking for guidance and direction so you can find your way home.

- Telling those whom you love in this life that you love them, each day, so that those words never go unsaid. The hardest thing is to lose a loved one, and not hear those words spoken one last time in your ears.
- **Letting go** of possessiveness and possessions. Since you can't take them with you, isn't it better to be prepared to let them go and take your responsibility that they go to a good cause? We ought to begin by keeping what is only essential for our personal needs, remembering that Jesus took nothing about with him.
- Be generous. Give gladly and thank God for the opportunities presented to you to help others through personal generosity. But be sure it is about them and not about you.
- Be thankful. Give thanks every morning when you awake for the blessings you enjoy. Thank God for the people God has given to you. For the shelter over your head, the clothes on your back, the food on your table. Thank God for your health, and the miracle of your living. Remember to be grateful throughout your day.
- Read the Christian Prepper's Manual regularly-that is, of course, the BIBLE.
- Expect the unexpected.

I believe these are simple ways to be spiritually prepared. We can find peace in our hearts and minds if we follow the spiritual preparations, we will not be found anxious, wanting or worried when God returns for us and beckons us home.

Oh, and it probably doesn't hurt to keep a can of beans and some SPAM and a few bottled waters in your cabinet for a rainy day either! AMEN