



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. AMEN

In the first verse of our Gospel reading, Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” In fact, if you look at all of the reading in our lectionary for today, we see that the idea of fear is present, in Hebrews it is assumed not spoken. So not only do we have distractions in our world, but now we have fear. I think it too can get in our way of following Jesus. We are told by Luke that Jesus urges us, ‘Do not be afraid’. In fact, I read somewhere this week that God tells his people not to fear, 365 times in Scripture. That is one for every day of the year! Jesus, in our Gospel reading, has just told the disciples not to worry or be anxious, because the Father knows our needs. If we seek first the Father’s kingdom, he will give us both the kingdom and everything else that we need. Sounds like a solid promise and a good way to live our lives. BUT. . . . we are human and no matter how hard we try not to, we worry, we get anxious. Jesus can tell us over and over again to keep the goal in front of us, to keep their eyes on Him, keep the faith and be ready. And God knows we try but we still fear and worry about our futures.

Verse 40 says, ‘You also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Again, sounds rather straight forward, doesn’t it? BUT. . . . we are human, and no matter how hard we try not to, we worry. And when we are busy worrying, we are not keeping our eyes on Jesus and His eternal promise of heaven. When we worry our eyes fall from Jesus and our faith is compromised and it is by our faith that we are saved through the grace of God. Remember it is nothing we do, that can earn us eternal life. We need to continue in the faith until the Son of Man comes at an unexpected hour.

Do any of you remember when you were little and hardly could sleep the night before you were to leave on a long family vacation. Your little suitcase was packed, and you were so excited you could not sleep. You did not want to miss the big event and be like McCauley Culkin and get left home alone, so you go to bed early, with your clothes on! Hiding under the sheets so mom did not know, you were fully dressed except for shoes of course. Anticipation, excitement, were all present but you would not be late and left behind.

As we age our fears grow with us. We are not afraid to be left home alone because we are the one driving the car. But when we ask people what they fear the most, what do you think the answer is? Yup, it is

almost always about the future. And these fears come in many sizes and shapes. Some of you might fear the distress about your employment. Will we have a job to keep paying the rent or mortgage? Since the economy seems a bit turbulent right now, money for tomorrow is a huge cause of concern for many folks. What will happen to Social security and my pension payments if the economy falls.

Some of you might be concerned about your health and what it will be like in the next few years. Will you be able to stay in your home or have to move to a retirement home where more help is available. Some of you might be concerned about your children. Anyone? I am constantly worried about both my kids: the one that lives with us and the one that is far away in Las Vegas. Will they be OK when I am gone? What sort of struggles will they have with their health and welfare? How can I make sure that they are on the right track to follow me to heaven. That is a big one for me.

Jesus answers all these questions as He tells us not to be afraid, that our Father in heaven will always care for us. The promise that we will be taken care of, comes through loud and clear. We have a grace filled God and He will care for us always. But how does that help me pay the huge doctor bill I just got or to buy groceries for the whole month.

List your fears and undertake them head on, one by one. And then go, maybe first go to Matthew 6 one of my favorite verses that says, "And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" There is no need to worry, no need to be afraid of the future because Jesus has given us His promise, by this death, burial, and resurrection. We are forgiven, then given abundant life in His Kingdom here on earth and the promise of eternal life in heaven one day.

So, do you believe that promise? Did Jesus die for you personally? I hope you can say YES. Luther frequently in his writing used an old German word, *trotz*, which translates closely to "in spite of". In spite of all the hardships he had experienced, in spite of the fear and anxiety of the period when he lived, in spite of fearing for his life, in spite of anxiety over the fate of his followers and in spite of his reforming messages, Luther was unshakably confident in the promises of Jesus. He derived his power from his faith in God. And we need to do the same. Be confident in spite of the worries of the world and keep our eyes on Jesus' and His precious gift to us.

But what happens if the promise ends in the grave? Would you still be a follower of Jesus if there were no promise of heaven? Would you still be here this morning if your life would end with the last breath you take on earth? Not the point you say, but I want to remind you that this is the promise of Jesus. So, ask yourself, why do we follow Christ? Is it for His sake or ours? The answer to this question is a deep one. Would we have less reason to follow the Lord if heaven did not exist? Our faith would not produce, so to speak, an eternal promise, so would our faith be less relevant, or would it?

Do any of you remember The Impressions. They were a group that sang a lot about the Civil Rights movement. The lead singer was Curtis Mayfield. One of their biggest hits that is still relevant today was called "People Get Ready". It was all about salvation, freedom, and a better life that called for spiritual readiness, encouraging people to prepare for a better world, possibly the 2nd coming of Christ. Here is one of the verses:

*People get ready there's a train a comin'
You don't need no baggage you just get on board.
All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin'
Don't need no ticket you just thank the Lord.*

There certainly is a lot of Gospel in that song. And today we need to take heed. Christ will return again, maybe during our lifetime, maybe not. We can predict all we want and many things that were supposed to happen before His return, have come to pass. We can read into it all we want when we hear that Christ's return will be a time of incredible knowledge and travel. It will be a time characterized by tension between peoples and nations. It will be a time when social troubles envelop the world. There will be famines, pestilence, earthquakes, and wars. It will be a time of deception. It will be a time when sin will increase, and love decreases. So, are we living in a time close to Christ's return? It might sound like it to many, but Scripture is clear, only God knows for sure. Our call by Jesus, is to be ready. He tells us that He will return at an unexpected hour. And we need to be ready, to have our faith strong while waiting for judgement.

Sometimes, I think that we do not talk about the end time enough. We need to get the right picture and not be threatened by false prophets and nay-sayers. Only our good Lord will be the judge and He will look at our hearts and see the measure of our faith. We will be rewarded if we are ready when He returns.

By the time the Gospels were written, Christians were beginning to understand that Christ's return was being delayed beyond their expectation. Today, two thousand years of Christian history, we find it difficult to expect that Christ will come during our lifetime. We don't like to talk about the Second Coming. Eschatology, which is the branch of theology concerning last, or final matters such as death, the Judgement and the afterlife are often overlooked as unimportant. Yes, they will happen whether we are ready or not.

However, our warning today tells us that we should always be ready. Just like every minute counts in a life-or-death emergency, so does it when we are facing our final judgement or destination. Our being ready for Christ's return should be looked at with urgency. Our example in this text for today is waiting for the master to return from a wedding banquet. We don't know when he will come but he will reward those who are alert when he arrives home. Christ's return is somewhat of a mystery, but it is an important part in God's plan for our world and therefore an important element in our Christian faith.

Many people have come and gone trying to predict when Christ will return and to no avail. Christ will come as a thief in the night. And so how do we prepare for His return? We do not have to be awake like the owner of the house, so we don't get robbed at night. However, we can be prepared by always being faithful.

Keep your faith strong, be ready to meet Jesus face to face. He died for you and there is no reason on earth to question that. God's love is endless. He will never let us down. Believe in his promises, all of them. Have faith not fear. Forgiveness, abundant life, and the promise He will fulfill of eternal life for you in heaven one day is real. Be ready. AMEN