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The Last Sunday of the Church Year November 20, 2022

Promising Words to Patient Waiters

The Lord tells us that he will return to judge the living and the dead. He does not tell us *when* he will return. And so, we wait—not angrily as we might over a late flight; not fearfully as we might for a serious surgery; not lazily as we might for the sun to rise in the morning. We wait patiently because the certain promises of God make his Son’s return certain and absolute. Words of promise make patient waiting a delight for Christians.

Sermon

Luke 12:35-40

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

There are two natural reactions to receiving a wedding invitation from a friend or a loved one. The first is delight as you read the details of the invitation, RSVP to have the chicken or the salmon, anticipate time together with friends, and celebrate the love and union of the happy bride and groom. It’s only natural to delight over the wonderful time that is sure to be had by all! You may, however, feel just a tinge of dread upon receiving a wedding invitation as you consider all the arrangements that need to be made. You may have to buy a new outfit. You’ll have to figure out how you’re going to get there. You may have to book a hotel room, hire a babysitter, or ask a friend to watch over your house while you’re gone. Of course, you’re delighted about the wonderful, joyful wedding, but still there are all those pesky arrangements to be made in the meantime.

Today in the Gospel Jesus told a parable about the master of a home who made some arrangements so that he could go attend a wedding. He stationed watchmen to open the door for him when he returned. As is often the case with Jesus’ parables, this story applies directly to our lives. Jesus Christ is your Master, and

You are Christ’s Watchmen

You’re always on alert
You’re always ready for his return

The people of Israel saw his miracles. They heard him proclaim the forgiveness of sins. They flocked to Jesus from far and wide to see if the rumors they heard were true, and they were. When Jesus told this parable thousands upon thousands of people had descended upon a small Judean town to see the one called the Messiah, but he didn’t tell this parable to those crowds. Amid all the business and commotion, Jesus told this story to his disciples to give them instruction and encouragement for the difficult time that was to come.

Jesus began this parable by telling the disciples to be like diligent watchmen. Jesus told them, “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they may immediately open the door for him” (Lk.12:35,36). I imagine the watchman’s job

was simple, but difficult. It's simple: Always be ready, and always be on alert so that you can do your job when the time comes. For the watchmen in the parable, that meant being dressed properly with your robe tucked in so you could move quickly. That meant making sure there was oil in your lamp so you could see what you needed to see. The job was simple: a watchman was always to be alert. But I imagine that simple job got progressively more difficult as the hours slowly crept by. As the night grows longer and the legs grow tired, the watch gets more difficult. As the temperature drops and the evening cold sets in, the watch gets more difficult. As the oil in the lamp runs out and a flickering flame reflects upon drooping eyes, the watch gets more difficult. But might the most difficult part of the watch be fighting that little voice in the back of your head that constantly whispers, "Get comfortable. Grab a chair and have a seat! Grab a blanket and get warm! Rest your eyes for just a minute!" A watchman constantly fought against his urge to let his guard down, to take a rest, to be comfortable. But his job was to always be on alert. Simple enough, but not as easy as it sounds.

Can you see how you fit into this story, fellow disciples of Christ? Christ is your master. He ascended into heaven and has gone off to prepare a place for you. He's told you to watch for his return and given you instructions to follow in the meantime. You are Christ's watchmen: Always to be on alert, and ready to serve your Master. So, watchmen, how's the watch going? You've been on alert and ready for your Master's return for quite some time. Christ left this world over two thousand years ago. Generations of believers have stood their watches waiting for his return, and now it's your turn. Ever since the Spirit brought you to faith, you've been standing watch, waiting for your Master to come home. I imagine by now you've become acquainted with how difficult the watch can be. What's the most difficult part of your watch? Is it the ever-increasing aches and pains that grow worse and worse as your watch grows longer and longer? Might it be that constant battle between you and that voice that constantly whispers, "Get comfortable! Your master is a long way off. Let your guard down. Take a break from your service."

It may start small. A watchman lets himself lean up against a wall. He gets more and more comfortable there until he's sound asleep and good for nothing. That's exactly how sin works on us, Christ's watchmen. We get comfortable letting God's Word sit on the shelf one night. One night turns into a week. A week turns into a month, and soon enough God's Word simply collects dust on our shelves and doesn't do anyone a bit of good. We let our guard down once and give into temptation. Once becomes twice. Twice becomes a habit. Soon enough, that sin we committed once becomes a comfortable part of our routine.

Christ instructed and encouraged us, his watchmen to always be on alert. Just as he told the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation." Don't let your guard down for a second. Don't leave your post. Always be on alert. So, I'll ask again, "How's the watch going?" Are your eyes set on Christ and his return or the comforts of today and tomorrow? Do you live to follow your Master's instructions, or have you convinced yourself that there's time for that later? Have you faithfully served standing at your post, or have you given into that little voice telling you to serve yourself and get comfortable? When Christ returns, will he find you alert and watching for him?

That question is terrifying because we know that the sins of our past prove that we are not capable of always being on alert. Each time we've let our guard down, each time we've neglected our watch, each time we fall into temptation is evidence that we're incapable and unfit to serve Christ as his watchmen. But Christ didn't come to earth to be served by you. He came to serve you. He perfectly served you as he lived and died in your place. For thirty-three years Jesus always lived on alert fighting temptations to sin. The devil repeatedly tried to get Jesus to let his guard down and repeatedly was defeated by Jesus as he stood firm on God's Word and never faltered. Christ set his eyes on the cross where he would die for the sins of the world. While he was there, he thought of you. He thought of all your failures and neglect. And motivated by a deep unfathomable love for you, in the ultimate act of service he died for them and took them away.

Christ is your master, and he is your servant. Christ loves you. Christ forgives you. Christ lives to serve you. He has gone home to heaven where he's preparing a place for you. For now, you live as a dearly loved and forgiven servant of Christ and as such, you're always ready for his return, for Christ's love and forgiveness have made you ready.

Jesus' parables often contain something totally unexpected, and this one is no exception. Did you notice what happened when the master came home from the wedding? When the master found his servants ready for his return, he

dressed himself to serve his servants, had them recline at a table, and served them. Any other master coming home late from a wedding celebration would have gone straight to bed, but not this one, not Christ. This master returned and immediately got to work serving those who served him. You are Christ's watchmen, and this is how it will be with you. Jesus lived to serve you and be your substitute. Jesus died and rose to serve you and be your redeemer. Jesus lives and will live forever more to serve you and to give you life everlasting.

He promised he would prepare a place for you. He promised he would come back. When? When will our master return? Jesus told us that we don't know. "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you don't expect him." As a thief breaks in at an hour the owner of the house does not expect, so also Christ will return at an hour we do not expect. So, we must always be ready for his return.

You are Christ's watchmen. Are you ready for his return? People have gotten themselves into all sorts of trouble coming up with an answer to this question. During the time of the Apostles, the Thessalonians quit their jobs, sold their homes, and sat around doing nothing as they waited for Christ's return. We might say they were too ready as they neglected the duties of their lives. Around the time of Martin Luther, monks lived in constant fear as they tried to atone for their sins by relying on their own good works. We might say that they weren't ready at all as they didn't know the forgiveness that Christ had already won for them.

You're not them. You're you. You're always ready for Christ's return. You're heard the gospel truth that your sins are forgiven. You've heard your Savior's promise that he's coming soon. You've heard the message of the Word about Christ, and that gospel message has given you faith, faith that trusts that the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Almighty God, *your* God, who will surely make good on every promise that he's made to you.

You are Christ's watchmen. You're always ready for Christ's return. As your watch grows longer, and you feel your spirit growing weary, look to Christ in his Word to strengthen your faith. Get comfortable in church pews and in the pages of Scripture where you will find the comforting, strengthening, life-giving gospel promises of Christ that will provide you with what you to keep watch today and in all the days to come.

God didn't just invite you to the eternal delight of his wedding feast in heaven. He sent his Son to take care of all your arrangements. He grabbed you by the gospel and claimed you as his own and he will never let you go. Christ is your Master, your Friend, and your Redeemer. You are Christ's watchman. Stay alert! Stay ready! Be at peace, for He is coming soon. Amen.