

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector    Scripture: Luke 12:32-40

***“Be Ready!”***

Could you imagine your wedding day – without having had months of preparation, planning and then the rehearsal?

- When the birth or adoption of a child is due – we get a crib, paint or wallpaper the room, and make a place for the little addition to your life.
- It is a wise practice to prepare and save for retirement – if at all possible.
- During the months of June to December - the southeastern part of the U.S. stays ready for hurricanes, with bottled water, canned goods, batteries, and candles – just in case.
- How many people do you know who own snow shovels or a snow blower? Or maybe they own a generator?

These preparations are all well and good – but isn't it ironic that we can be so carefully prepared for these important events and not be ready or prepared for the most significant and life impacting event of history – the promised return of Jesus Christ.

There are 260 chapters in the New Testament, and the return of Jesus Christ is mentioned at least 318 times in those chapters. **One verse in twenty five mentions the return or second coming of our Lord.** These are just a few of the reminders:

- *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”* (James 5:7-8)
- *“Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”* (Hebrews 9:28) (the debt has already been paid – for those)
- *“So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 1:7-8)

The picture of the master of a household and his slaves and the important pattern of being ready and watchful when he returns - are strengthened by several brief parables and sayings that Jesus gives to us. Each of them supports the theme of being ready for His return and the coming judgment. When waiting for their master to return from a party, the servants should stay formally dressed and ready to serve him, and they should keep the lamps lit so that the pathway into the house would be lit.

In the first century a wedding celebration could last from several hours to several days – and you had to be prepared. (Remember the Wedding Feast of Cana, when they ran out of wine – and our Lord was asked by His mother to help- and so He transformed water into wine.) When the master of the house was away – the servants were supposed to keep everything in order – doing all of the chores, but the temptation was always there to slack off – because it is human nature to think – “Oh, I've got time before he comes.” Jesus says that we have to be like faithful servants who are **always ready!**

- They are up, dressed,
- watching, and waiting
- and their lamps are burning.

The proper, prepared and ready servant will be there when the master knocks and “*may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.*” (Luke 12:36) There should be no last minute dash to get things ready! They need to be ready so they can respond to his knock right away. Jesus’ parable speaks of the master being **so impressed that he will turn the tables on them and become their servant and give a celebration in their honor.**

The Jewish night was divided into four watches.

- The first was from sunset or dark until nine o’clock;
- the second from nine until midnight;
- the third from midnight until three in the morning,
- and the fourth from three until dawn.

No man could watch around the clock, but even if some slept, the servant who was watching would have time to awaken the others so that they would be ready to meet the Master. When the Lord changed the image to that of a thief coming in the night, He introduced a note of danger. Since thieves do not make appointments ahead of them, the only way to be ready for the thief’s entry is to be ready - always. So if you do not want to be surprised, you should be ready at all times for the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus, Himself reminds us of this in His words from Revelation 16:15 “*Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.*”

With Jesus’ speaking of the lamps, it would be quite natural for this scripture to be connected with the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. The first century lamp was a small piece of pottery sometimes resembling a gravy-boat and often as small as the palm of the hand. The wick floated on the top of the oil. There is no escaping the importance of oil and the need to have a ready supply on hand. In the parable – there were five of the ten virgins who hoped to rejoice with the bridegroom but because they ran out of oil, their hopes of celebration were turned to sorrow. So much for being ready!

Jesus said it this way in the Gospel of Mark: “*But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.*” *Therefore, be on the alert-- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. **“What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”*** (Mark 13:32-37) Jesus had a lot to say to us about being ready. Jesus is suggesting to us that He intends to reward any who faithfully awaits His return. **He wants to encourage those who already believe in Him,** to tell them that all the promises that He has given them will be fulfilled.

On the other hand, when Jesus returns – there will be judgment for those who have not prepared by accepting Him and being in relationship with Him. (If you do not know Him- there will be consequences!) Jesus is quite clear in Matthew 24:42-51 of the consequences and says: “*Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when*

*you do not think He will. "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 24:42-51)  
There are consequences!

When Jesus comes again, things will be different – then it will be the master who will be joyfully waiting on the servants – God’s own Son will be the servant of those who are expecting Him – who are ready – who know Him.

Being ready **does not mean that we know when Jesus is coming**. What does it mean to be ready? In the verses immediately following today’s Gospel, and especially in verse 45 Jesus describes a servant who is not ready who says: *“My master will be a long time in coming, and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk”* (Luke 12:45) In other words – the unfaithful servant is living a life as if the master would not return. (The last thing on that person’s mind is salvation, the last thing on their mind is “who is Jesus Christ,” the last thing on that person’s mind is thinking that there are any consequences to sin – just as we have seen in our culture today.) He thinks that he can use and abuse his power as much as he wants, because no one will hold him accountable. Jesus continues: *“the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place **with the unbelievers.**”* (Luke 12:46) Jesus is clear – if you do not believe in Him, if you do not trust in Him, if you do not look to Him for salvation - as *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life – for no one comes to the Father, but through Him”* (John 14:6) – then those are not ready. **For those who are not ready – Jesus’ second coming will be quite an unpleasant surprise!**

**The servant who is ready is already a member of the shepherds’ “little flock”** and whose mind is not on earthly things - as Jesus says God *“your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32) **We are to be in this world, but not of it.** As Jesus said: *“for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Luke 12:34)

- If it is stuff you want – then stuff you will get – if it is Jesus Christ and eternal life that you live for – then indeed that will be your reward!
  - The servant who is ready is the one who always does what his master entrusted him to do. The Lord answered, "And the Lord said, *"Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.*"
- (Luke 12:42-44) This faithful servant does not have to make any special preparations – he is always ready. He does not need to know the time of his master’s arrival. He is ready - anyway – and that is how Jesus encourages us to live our lives.

I want to close with the very last recorded words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which can be found in the Book of Revelation. Jesus says: **"Yes, I am coming quickly."**

(Revelation 22:20) I think it is clear that the return of our Lord Jesus Christ should be on all of our hearts and minds – which faithfully leads us to work for and desire to BE READY! **“When**

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 14, August 8, 2010, Year C

***the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"*** (Luke 18:8) If you know Jesus Christ, then you are ready!