

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:32-40

"Are You Available?"

There was a young boy who presented his Father with a riddle. He excitedly told him that "there were 3 frogs sitting on a big rock, and one of them decided to jump." Then he asked his Dad "How many frogs were left on the rock?" And his father immediately answered "of course TWO." The boy began to laugh hysterically! "There are still 3 - because the frog only just decided to jump but he had not yet actually jumped."

Think about this -- each one of us needs to listen carefully to Christ's message before we jump -- before we react -- or over react. In today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus gives His followers three instructions to follow in order to be in ready preparation for when the Lord comes back.

The first instruction is **for us to be available for Him**. Available is defined as "able to be used or obtained, or spoken to or consulted." Plainly put -- we need to be available for whatever comes our way -- whatever the Lord has prepared for us to do or to deal with. You know there are many reasons that people -- being unprepared -- have their spirituality virtually cave in or collapse.

Here are some examples: we are faced with many circumstances in life such as

1. trials,
2. problems,
3. obstacles, and
4. temptations.

I am sure that you can relate to each one of these. Sometimes we allow these things to manipulate us but, we need to be alert and ready to face these head on and be balanced in preparation for whatever might come. We have to be willing to accept and do His ways and follow His directions, which can be found in His Holy Word.

Being available also means that we need to be dressed for action. Imagine how foolish it would be for a soldier to go out in battle without combat gear- no provisions, no weapons, and no navigational tools. How about a football player going on the field without helmet and pads, or a hockey player with no skates and no pads -- totally defenseless? The Lord, through St. Paul in Ephesians 6:13-17 instructs us to "*take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*"

God has already given us His spiritual armor; our job is to be aware of the equipment he has provided and ask Him to dress us in it each and every day. Satan wants to destroy us, so we've got to be focused on the battle and not let our passion fade.

Jesus' **second instruction is for us to** patiently wait for His return.

God's timing is something that is hard for most of us to accept. We are an instant generation -- just add water -- and oatmeal! Throw it in the microwave and instant pizza -- or a four course meal. If we have to wait -- we more often than not will pass up opportunities.

Are you familiar with the Chinese bamboo tree? The seed is planted -- and then faithfully watered and fertilized. The first year nothing happens! The second year -- it is watered and fertilized and still nothing happens. The third and fourth year -- watered, fertilized -- and you

guessed it – nothing happens. Sometime during the fifth year, in a period of about six weeks, the Chinese bamboo trees grow roughly ninety feet! The question is – did it grown ninety feet in six weeks or did it grow ninety feet in five years? The answer is – five years – because if it had not been tended to, watered and fertilized – there would have not been any bamboo tree.

Isn't it remarkably true that each one of us has had a Chinese bamboo experience? We are all faced with situations in our lives that we want instant results, instant answers, and God does not work that way. Every prayer is answered by Him – sometimes it is yes, sometimes it is no, but sometimes the answer is – wait! It is the times when we are impatient and try to force God's hand – that is where we run into major disappointments. Take for example Abraham – the faithful friend of God. In today's Old Testament reading – we read where God make a covenant with Abraham. In this covenant – God promised Abram and Sarai an heir. (**Genesis 15:5**) He told Abram "*Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.*" Then he said to him, "*So shall your descendants be.*" We read in the next chapter that Abram and Sarai were impatient and could not wait for God to bless them – instead they took things into their own hands – and used Hagar – the Egyptian servant as a surrogate. The result was Ishmael – but not the one that God promised. When Abraham was ninety nine years old – in God's timing – not Abraham's – Isaac, the promised heir would be born, and from his line would come the nations of Israel. The children of Ishmael – the Ishmaelites – would later be at odds with the Israelites – and still are today.

It is so important to listen to God, to be in His Word – awaiting His instructions for our lives – and to be ready to be amazed by what He will do in our lives. Especially – when He comes again in Glory! To not wait patiently is to take things into our own hands! We have to wait upon the Lord.

Jesus final instruction to us in this Gospel is **for us to keep watching**.

To watch means to stay awake intentionally. The act of keeping awake is to guard, protect and to attend, and a state of alert and continuous attention. The great English writer - William Shakespeare said we are so much influenced by the world because of unawareness and in not staying to keep in watch. Jesus is not telling us to over caffeinate – or to somehow defy the physical limitations that have been put upon our bodies. Instead – Jesus is telling each one of us to stand guard – to protect the faith – to let nothing dilute the power of the Word of God, to not allow God's intentions for His people to be changed – and to **not modify or seek “new and profound interpretations” of the Holy Bible that are more suitable to our lifestyle**. We are not to try and sculpt our own comfort zone – dictated by our desires and the desires of today's culture. While on our “watch” we have to be ready – to defend against those who find Jesus as something other than the Only Son Of God! We have been given such a rich treasure – God's Holy Word – both written and Incarnate. Is your heart all about this treasure - or the treasure of this world; the treasure of this culture? Are we good stewards of everything that God has given us – especially His Word – and the heritage that goes with it? Or are we so in love with this world – and the things of it – that we would be so preoccupied with stuff that we would not be ready when the Lord comes again. **Luke 12:40** "*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*" **Matthew 24:36** "*But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

Be on your guard – prepare each day – in grateful obedience – with the intention that **today could be the day – now could be the hour**.

Friday night, we were blessed here at St. Bartholomew's to have John Schlitt and Bob Hartman – II Guys From Petra – in concert. They are very dear friends – who have become partners in ministry with all of us. They were once again treated warmly by everyone – and we were treated to a time of worship, praise, and some good old God Centered Rock 'n Roll. What an awesome time – and the Holy Spirit blessed each one present with an evening that they will never forget. Fr. Ward and I had the privilege of spending some time with them before and after the event. They shared with us that they had a remarkable time here – and that they stand with us in our struggle to defend the Faith once received. They know and can see the evidence that the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ lives here – and is protected, loved, and preached here. We believe that Jesus is who He said He was – and that every word He said is TRUTH. **John 14:6** Jesus said "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" There is nothing to interpret or dissect – He is TRUTH! End of story! So, can you tell me why so many of my brothers and sisters in collars can't seem to get the point?

Bob is quite a prolific songwriter – having written most of the songs throughout Petra's marvelous ministry of over 33 years. His songs are not just nice songs but a based on Scripture. Let me give you an example of two songs that I believe fit perfectly with this Gospel lesson.

Please listen to these words from Holy Scripture:

Matthew 9:37-38 "*Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

Romans 12:1-2 "*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

These two passages are the very inspiration for this song – here's just a portion:

I Am Available

Words and music by Bob Hartman

Based on Matthew 9:37-38 and Romans 12:1

*I am available, I will go when you say go
I am available, I will stop when you say no
My whole life was incomplete till I laid it at Your feet
So use me as You will, I am available*

1 Peter 3:15 "*sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.*"

2 Timothy 4:2 "*Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*"

Both Peter and Paul's words were enough to inspire Bob to write:

Ready, Willing, and Able

Words and music by Bob Hartman

Based on 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Timothy 4:2

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 14, August 12, 2007, Year C

To advance the light and defend the right - Ready, willing and able

Lifting up the cross to the waiting lost - Ready to serve and willing to go

Able to stand against the foe - Ready, willing and able!

He's already given us all that we need - With love in our message and hope in our creed

When Yahweh is for us and faith is our stay - No power below us can stand in our way

Can you see what I mean? Almost every song in Petra's catalogue has been inspired by God's Word – to encourage us and strengthen us in our daily walk with the Lord.

In light of Jesus' instructions and these awesome examples of Holy Scripture speaking to today's culture – let me ask you:

Are you ready; are you prepared for the next thing that Our Lord Jesus has for you; whatever it is? Are you ready, willing, and able? More importantly – are you available?