

“The Big Ready”  
 August 7, 2016  
 Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost  
 Luke 12: 32-40

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

### Introduction

Today I say, “Be fearless.” These times call for bravery. Young people, I have a message for you this morning, if you are to truly live out your calling as people who follow Jesus Christ, you must do it with courage. The first thing we hear Jesus say in today’s gospel reading is:

*“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*

God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We heard about old Abraham in today’s reading from the book of Hebrews; how he was called out from his homeland to a place where he would receive an inheritance and a new home, and how by faith he and his descendants would trust God. And in this passage from the Gospel of Luke we hear Jesus calling out his followers to a new home that God is preparing. What is ancient and true remains with us today. With the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God has broken into the world, and by degrees continues to spread to this day.

What an amazing and astounding thing it is that God is giving us what Jesus calls “the kingdom.” And what an awesome and serious responsibility we now bear; and yet it comes with this encouragement in today’s passage to 1) not be afraid, and 2) to get ready.

### What Really Matters

Fearless preparation. When you walk in the way of Jesus Christ it demands a costly sacrifice. What does Jesus say?

*“Sell your possessions, and give alms.”* That may sound scary to you. He calls his disciples to let go of their stuff and give it away to those in need. It’s a reminder of last week’s lesson when Jesus told a story about storing up treasures in earthly barns instead of investing in the things of God. Now, be clear, this is not a call to take a vow of poverty. While that may be the calling of some who follow Jesus, this is not what God requires of all of us. But he *is* calling us to have a different kind of mindset. In our Western culture we understand success as climbing upward and getting what we believe is coming to us. But God is asking all of us to have a kingdom of heaven perspectives and to re-align our priorities to honor God and our fellow human beings. It matters how you save and spend your resources.

Jesus says, *Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

You will spend your money on what really matters to you. Carefully consider what has a hold of your heart.

To be ready for the kingdom of God, we need to fearlessly refocus our ways from only tending to ourselves to investing in others. Yes, we are responsible to care for the ones entrusted to us, and this word is by no means against earning a living for an

honest day's work. Nor is this a debate about capitalism, socialism, or communism. Jesus is simply saying that if your possessions become an obstacle between you and God, or between you and others, then that is when it is time to sell your stuff and give the money to the poor.

#### A Call to Action—Radical Preparation

But there is something else. Something even more important. Jesus issues a call to action. You've got to *get ready*. God is gladly handing us the keys to the kingdom, but if you're going to enter into something, get ready to do it, and do it well. Or as Jesus says,

*"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit."*

Radical preparation and the pursuit of excellence. Whatever we do we, we do it as if for God. Any of our ministry here through this local church, anything out there in our everyday encounters with the people God puts in our path, or anything in the privacy of our quiet moments alone with God. All of these require intentional good and excellent effort.

Jesus tells us,

*"Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks."*

Staying alert, doing our work as if for God, and always ready for Jesus to walk in the door is the approach we take in ministry and in our everyday lives. Now, that is something that will transform your family, your community and the world.

#### A Role Reversal

And Jesus is a different kind of master. When he shows up he takes everyone by surprise; because he is the kind of Lord who comes to do what no other would do.

*"Blessed are those slaves,"* we hear in the Gospel, *"whom the master finds alert when he comes. Truly I tell you he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them."* The good news is that we serve a God who serves us. The good news of Jesus Christ is that he comes to lay down his life for the sake of others. It's the upside-down kingdom where the first shall be last, and the last shall be first; where the Creator of all is the servant of all.

*"And if he comes during the middle of the night,"* Jesus continues, *"or near dawn, and finds them ready, blessed are those slaves."*

And there's the thing you need to catch. When he comes he is looking for those who are ready. God is giving the kingdom to those who are prepared and ready at any moment for Jesus to show up.

#### The Big Ready

So when is Jesus going to show up? How does this all end up? This becomes our focus. So much energy is spent trying to predict when Jesus will return. In the meantime, we may be missing the whole point, which is to get ready. Because he comes sooner than we think.

Be ready today for Jesus to show up as the stranger in need.

Be ready today for Jesus to show up as the sick one who needs prayer.

Be ready today for Jesus to show up as the one you have called enemy.

Be ready today for Jesus to show up knocking at the door of your own heart.

Be ready today for Jesus to show up at any time, in any place.

Our mystery of faith proclaims it. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We must be ready. *Radically* ready.

*“But know this,”* Jesus concludes, *“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.”*

So true that the enemy, that thief of life, snuck in when we weren't paying attention, wreaking havoc on our lives ever since. We were caught unawares; we should have been ready.

*You also must be ready,”* Jesus says, *“for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”*

The time for fear is past. The call is on your lives. The world is in desperate need of good news, and we are the ones who carry the redeeming mark of Christ on our lives, and we share the good news of the kingdom of God, which is told in how we live our lives. Be dressed for action and let your lamps be lit.

Today the Table of the Lord is set and ready for action, and the lamps are lit. Are you ready? is the light in your heart lit? Are you prepared for interaction with the Spirit of God?

A miracle occurs in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Spirit of God accesses our lives in this meal and nourishes us with God's grace. This is a time of revelation, healing, and hope. This is the meal of the Lord and blessed are those ready to receive it. A prepared heart is one that is humbly opened to God exposing everything for God to see.

It is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom; and we remain ready to welcome and serve Jesus at every turn. In the end, though, it is Jesus who always serves us. This is the meaning of the Table. Be ready. Because in this place and at this time we share a spiritual meal in which we are served by the Lord of all who knows nothing else but to give us the kingdom through himself in ultimate service and sacrifice. Amen