

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
11 August 19
VIII Trinity
Proper 14 Year C RCL
Isaiah 1: 1, 10-20
Psalm 50: 1-8
Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16
Luke 12: 32-40**

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

Do we really believe that the Son of Man is coming? At an unexpected hour? Are we ready? It's a hot topic for a sermon. But then again there are several nugats, or jewels in this passage, material for several good sermons — do not be afraid; sell your possessions and give alms; where no thief comes near and no moth destroys; where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And that is just the first paragraph of our gospel passage today! There is also, 'be dressed for action have your lamps lit', 'blessed are the slaves'; and 'if the owner of the house had known when the thief was coming he would not have let his house be broken into...'

So let me see if I can weave them all together into one common theme. But it may take a while, maybe an hour. So settle in, it's not that hot today... I'll have you out of here by 1300 or 1330! Just kidding. Certainly not the Anglican way.

'You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.' I remember when I was in primary school, about 9 years old in the early 1960's someone predicted the end of the world, and it was widely publicized. My friends and I were terrified. Having heard it on the television evening news, we were talking about it on the school playground. When the teacher figured out what had her class so upset, she gave us a little talk after recess. Interestingly, she did it from a religious perspective that is much more difficult to do today, and she told us that Jesus says over and over that 'no one will know the hour...' of the coming of the Son of Man. 'No one knows the hour,' so we were very reassured.

But I would like to suggest that this gospel message is not about the timing of the end times, of the apocalypse. That has been predicted over and over and over again, without results. I think it is about something bigger than that; something more long term, and yet imminent. If you would hold both those thoughts at once.

Jesus talks a lot about being ready, being prepared. He says earlier in this gospel reading, 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit,' He tells the parable of the bridesmaids and one who didn't have enough oil and her lamp went out. He says to be ready for the journey and to travel light, take no extra coat or extra sandals, be ready to go. He chides the disciples for not being able to watch with him in the garden, 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' Keep your

hand on the plow, don't look back. There are many scriptural passages about readiness. In our lives we prepare, whether it is packing a bag getting ready for a trip, planning a dinner party, preparing for houseguests. And in the Church calendar year we have seasons of readiness, Advent and Lent; seasons of preparation, preparing our hearts for the great feasts of Christmas and Easter. And there is much about our liturgy that requires readiness and preparation, it is not happenstance or spontaneous. Our weekly worship services don't just happen. The readings have to be selected, hymns chosen, pew sheets printed, building opened, lights on, altar readied, choir rehearsed, chalice and paten and bread and wine set out, candles lit. Lots of preparation. Getting ready, getting prepared. And just before the service the altar party and choir say our prayers together.

The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. How are we to get ready for that? What are we to do? We are sinful human beings and we are not able to earn our way into heaven. Even if we were as good as we possibly could be. Though we may be able to do things to absolutely keep us out of heaven, we don't earn our way in. That Jesus did for us on the Cross. We talk about grace. Salvation freely given. But we do have responsibility in the equation. So how are we to be ready? How are we to prepare?

I would like to suggest that is about how we live our lives walking with God. Regularly, daily, hourly. In Rome there is a very famous church that is a good example, the Church of St. Mary Maggiore. It is a very old church and they have said Mass, celebrated the Eucharist, every day since the 5th century. That is over 550,000 times! Even today on a regular day they have seven masses on the schedule, so even if you discount the numbers a bit for less active times and multiply by only three or four you get Mass said over 2 million times! Talk about walking with God, living the faith, preparing.

Some places in our Anglican tradition we have the luxury of daily Eucharist. It is actually quite a blessing to be in such a place. But we also have something, inherited from the our monastic forbears that is particularly rich in our Anglican tradition, and that is available to us all; and that is the Daily Office. Now refined to four brief services of prayer — Morning Prayer, NoonDay Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline. A shortened version of the monks praying around the clock.

Years ago I started saying the Daily Office: Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline. I love doing it. And it is amazing how comforting and sustaining it is to do so. Now to be fair and not to put myself on a pedestal, I don't get it done all the time. Not very well at all. Life gets in the way: work, schedules, social, travel, distractions. I fall way short. But it is my intention. And I can't tell you how sustaining it is. And for some reason that I cannot explain, it is a truism, that regardless of how very busy I am, if I take time, make the time, and start the day with Morning Prayer, the day goes so much better... and I get a great deal more done.

Now I know you can't eat the elephant in one bite and you may not be able to start with doing the full Daily Office every day. And that we have to have snacks before we feast. But one vignette may be helpful. Years ago when I was still a seminarian, a parishioner at my home parish sought counsel during a difficult period in her life. I believe she was in the middle of a divorce. I suggested to her that she occasionally pick up the Book of Common Prayer (US version of Common Worship) and read Evening Prayer. And that she do so when having a particularly difficult day. To this day, when I see her she recounts to me how very helpful that

one suggestion has been to her throughout her life. I can't explain it (well I can!) but things go so much better...

I liken it to sitting down with a good friend and having a cup of tea. Having a chat, sitting, relaxing, talking. Comfort. And preparation. It makes a difference. And today there are even Apps for it, making it available all the time and everywhere. I can come home from the worst day, be tense or anxious or upset, and sit down and read Evening Prayer, and it all just melts away... Or in the middle of the day, stopping for Noonday Prayer. That sitting still with God for a bit. Think about having a cup of tea with God regularly.

So being ready, being prepared is indeed about walking with God! Regularly, daily, hourly. Walking with God, praying to God, knowing God on a regular faithful basis. Jesus is telling us in the gospel that being ready is about walking with God. Remember that praying to God does not necessarily change God or God's mind. But it does change us. And that is getting prepared. And it prepares us to handle whatever life throws our way. For we can't control what happens to us but we can control our response. And that is being prepared by walking with God.

C.S. Lewis, that great English religious author wrote, 'The Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished slave trade, all left their mark on the earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world, that they have become ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither.'

Aim at heaven. And walk with God. Know Jesus. And you will be prepared.

Amen.