

Be Watchful — Rev. Denise Stone

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 8-11-19

Today's text fits in nicely with the text and sermon from last week. If you recall, last week we talked about the Parable of the Rich Fool. Who, when faced with an unexpectedly large harvest, decided to tear down old barns and build new, bigger ones. His plan was to secure his future and sit back and relax. God, however, informed the rich man that his life would be ending that night and just who would benefit from all of the man's plans.

Jesus is speaking directly to the disciples in the larger context of today's section of chapter 12. Jesus is instructing the disciples to not be worried about their belongings or how God will meet their needs. The verses preceding today's text talk about how God cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.

We pick up today with Jesus telling the disciples that it is God's pleasure to give them the Kingdom. That is to include them in God's plans as made possible through Jesus Christ. In direct contrast to the Rich Fool, the disciples are told to sell their possessions and give alms (to the poor). They are to make purses or bags that will not fall apart – because they are

holding the treasure of Heaven. This treasure will not be destroyed or stolen.

Verse 34 is one we have all probably heard at some point in our life, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

With verse 35 we make a slight shift in focus. Where the disciples had previously been instructed to give of their earthly goods and have a heavenly treasure, they are now told to be watchful.

The picture painted is of servants waiting for their master to return home from a wedding. They are to be waiting and dressed to serve their master whenever he might return – even if in the middle of the night. Then Jesus suggests something that might happen if the servants did that. Jesus suggests that when the Master returns home and finds his servants completely prepared for his return, the Master will turn around and serve the servants.

In the commentary on verses 36-37, by John Noland, Noland wrote, “As an expression of the relationship of master and slave, the imagery is not at all true to life; but the point may be precisely that things are quite different in the kingdom of God.”ⁱ

Jesus' warning about being watchful comes in the last two verses of today's text. Jesus told his disciples, "But know 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, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Pastor David Lose in an article on this passage said, "The edge in the last verses - reward for those who were ready and what feels like a thinly veiled threat to those who are not - only heightens the sense of expectancy for, and tension around, Jesus' instructions." ii

In some ways the verses of today's text selection seem disjointed, in that they do not flow easily from one topic to the next. However, they really are all about being ready to be a part of and to work in the Kingdom of God.

One of the things that I find fascinating about Jesus when he talks about the Kingdom of God is that the Kingdom is a present reality as well as a future promise. The Kingdom of God became a present reality with the birth of Jesus. God became flesh and dwelt among us. The Kingdom is now. But there is also a future promise of an eternal Kingdom of God.

Part of the present reality of the Kingdom is that we are to give of our possessions – alms to the poor, sharing with those in need, helping people who are struggling, caring for strangers as well as sharing the good news of Jesus with people we meet. In doing so, we store up treasure in heaven.

While we are working in God's Kingdom now, we also are to be watching for the coming of God's eternal Kingdom.

Growing up I remember hearing the adults in my church discussing what the second coming of Jesus would be like and how it would happen. Reading the Book of Revelation to try to get an idea of when Jesus would come back to earth to take his followers to heaven was a big deal.

I always thought that was a bit of a waste of time – because of verses in the Gospels like verse 40 today. Verse 40 says, "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

We do not know when Jesus is coming back and trying to figure that out takes time away from our "being ready."

What does it mean for us to be ready? It means that we do the things that Jesus taught us to do. Those

are the things in all of the verses of today's text and of all of chapter 12. I encourage you this week to take time to read it.

It can feel overwhelming to think that we need to give away everything that we have and that we need to be on alert 24/7 and be ready to serve at a moment's notice. Something else that Pastor Lose said in his article was that we need to notice how today's text begins. Jesus begins this set of instructions with the phrase, "Do not be afraid."

Typically, "Do not be afraid," is the rhetorical prelude to the announcement of God's mighty and saving deeds. And it is the starting point and anchor for everything else in this passage. It is God's good pleasure - God's intention, plan, and delight - to give you the kingdom! If this is true, then disciples can, indeed, resist the seduction of wealth, not fall prey to constant anxiety about worldly needs, share what they have with others, and wait expectantly, even eagerly, for the coming of the Son of Man. ⁱⁱⁱ

In thinking about the need to be ready, the need to be watchful, Karoline Lewis, a Professor of Preaching, suggested

Being ready for Jesus' second coming is less about any actual time and place and more about imagining Jesus' activity in the world, when and where you least expect it or imagine seeing it. In other words, waiting around, waiting for instructions, is not going to cut it. Fear, treasure, and being prepared is **the** pattern for discipleship. Being without fear, knowing the source of your treasure -- that is, your identity, your worth -- makes it possible to be prepared for and an actual participant in God's kingdom.^{iv}

As you leave here today, know that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you **ARE** part of the Kingdom of God – in its present reality and in its future promise.

ⁱ Word Biblical Commentary, *Luke*, John Noland. Comment Section, Chapter 12 verses 36-37.

ⁱⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=729

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=729

^{iv} https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1805