

Sunday 15th August 2021 – Luke 12:35-40 ‘Be ready’

In modern life, we generally know exactly when to be ready for important things. This week, for example, about 1.5 million students were anxiously waiting for their GCSE or A-level results. Our family was one of those – and we knew that the email would arrive in our daughter’s inbox at 8.30am on Tuesday.

Similarly for those of you who’ve been hooked on the Olympics until last Sunday, much of life has been planned around being ready to watch particular events or athletes that you’ve been wanting to support. Indeed, when the weather unexpectedly disrupts the sailing or the rowing, that makes news in itself.

On the other hand, the last 18 months have also given us sobering reminder of what it’s like to live with uncertainty. For much of this period we don’t know what is likely to happen, and when. When will lockdown ease? When will I get the text inviting me to get a job? Will I get pinged? Will I be furloughed – and if so, when will I return to work? When can I hug my family? When can I do the hobby that I love doing? You can probably add ten other questions to that list!

And *our response to this has been mixed*. For some, we have tried to live with this by endlessly planning what we might do, and then endlessly re-arranging those plans – but the planning in itself gives us a sense of security and hope. For others, we might have given up making plans altogether, waiting instead for life to feel less restricted before we even think of getting ready for anything.

Whilst these differing approaches are largely driven by our personalities, the end result is still the same. There are some uncertainties in life we simply can’t avoid, and we have to learn to find ways to live with that. Or to put it another way, we have to learn to live with some things being out of our control.

In today’s passage, Jesus talks about **the greatest uncertainty of all** – and one that, for all our technological and social advances, we still can’t know any more now than we did before – and that is when God will call time on our world; **when Jesus will return and make all things new**. It could be tomorrow, it could be hundreds or thousands of years – but either way, the one thing Jesus promises is this: ‘the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.’

Why does this matter? Well, at heart of our faith is the conviction that this world will not last forever, and is not our final destination. God will one day restore creation to the perfection he planned for it, and will right every wrong, bind up every wound and share the perfect beauty and joy of his eternal relationship of love with all who would be a part of it. **Eternity is what we are made for**. In the words of the old 19-century spiritual: ‘This world is not my home – I’m just a-passin’ through.’

Jesus’ return to earth – what is popularly known as ‘The Second Coming’ – marks the moment when eternity becomes the only and final reality. It’s something we commemorate every time we share bread and wine, in fact we’ll say the words shortly: ‘Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.’ But only God knows when that will be. So how are we to live in the light of the sure and certain knowledge that Jesus will return, we just don’t know when?

Jesus’ advice is disarmingly simple: ‘be ready.’ **Be ready**. In other words, if Jesus was to come back *today*, would you be ready to meet him?

But what does being ready look like? It's worth noting that this passage comes directly after what we've been looking at over the last couple of weeks, which is really **all about our priorities**. The problem for the rich fool was his priorities were all about himself and not others, or God. And likewise when Jesus talks about our treasure being the key to our hearts, it's an encouragement to set our *priorities* on the things of heaven, on living as God wants. Get your priorities right, Jesus says, and you'll live ready.

We can then develop this idea with the very images Jesus himself uses at the start of our passage. **First, he says: 'be dressed'**. In other words, be alert, be awake. Keep the idea in mind that this world is not your final destination. If we expect Jesus to return, we may not live to see it, but it won't do us any harm. All the great saints of history expected Jesus to return in their lives – and, though none of them were in that final generation, they still get to be with Jesus anyway – and look at the fruit! Look at how someone like St Paul or John Wesley lived, the way they changed the world. They lived with passion, with a clarity of thinking which impacted thousands or even millions of lives.

It's natural that Jesus then says: 'be ready for service'. Knowing that something – or someone – is coming focuses the mind and helps us to live with purpose. That's what we do in our normal lives: if someone is coming to visit we clean our house, we tidy our rooms, we prepare refreshments. In the same way, if we're expecting Jesus to return, we keep the house of our lives clean, we attend to things we've neglected, we plan ways to offer blessings to others. What might that mean for you today?

Finally Jesus says: 'keep your lamps burning.' The use of lamps, for example in the temple, was used as an image of prayer and worship. In the same way, prayer and worship is vital for us to live ready. When we pray, we bring heaven to earth, we invite eternity into our day. Prayer is a foretaste of the direct connection we'll have with God in heaven. Similarly, whenever we gather in worship we are joining the eternal song of heaven, the perpetual praise of the angels worshipping Jesus. Again, we bring the things of heaven to this earth.

So let's be ready! In this season of uncertainty, perhaps this is a message we're more ready to hear than for a long time. We know we can't control much of what goes on in this world – but we can live ready for the promise of eternity, and for the return of the one who will put all things right. Stay alert, live with purpose, keep making your peace with God and with others, ask yourself regularly: is your heart leaning towards God or away from him? And keep praying and praising our glorious Lord. For the wonderful promise in this passage is that Jesus himself will honour those who live like this. Imagine that!