

**+ Luke 12:35-40 + Series: Blessed... + Theme: Blessed Are Those Who Wait! +
+ Last Sunday of the Church Year + 20 November 2016 +**

It's hard to be patient, isn't it? We live in an extremely fast-paced world with 24-hour news cycles, instant updates via social media, and the expectation that what you need now you should have by yesterday. Yet even aside from the fast-paced nature of our society, it's still hard to be patient, isn't it?

Some well-meaning friend or loved one tells you, "Patience is a virtue!", and the first thought that comes to your mind is, "Easy for you to say!" Tell that to the young couple planning their wedding that's months away. Tell that to the expecting mom with less than ten days until her due date or the parents wishing their toddler would realize that sleeping in her big girl bed actually means staying in bed. Tell that to the student who has been attending school since the age of 4 and graduation from college is only weeks away. Tell that to the aging worker whose retirement date is just around the bend after decades of faithful work. Tell that to the kids in your family as they notice that Thanksgiving is only four days away and certain stations are playing a certain seasonal kind of music and commercials all seem to have jingly bells and snow is falling and stores have long lines of grumpy, impatient people pushing carts loaded with all kinds of stuff for other people. Oh, and we're now under 35 days until... It's hard to be patient, isn't it?

Now imagine if you truly had no idea if any of that waiting and wondering and watching would actually end in the near future. At least for the couple-to-be or the expecting mom or the toddler-raising parents or the graduating student or the retiring worker or the hyper-excited kids, the end is realistically in sight. If the Lord allows, the wedding day will come. The baby will be born. The toddler will go to sleep at a reasonable time of night. Graduation or retirement will come, and so will Christmas.

Yet what if someone told you, "This (Great Fill-in-the-blank Event) is going to happen to you! You will be so excited. It will change your life in amazing ways and you will enjoy it for many years to come because it will be so great." You ask them, "When will this happen to me?" and they tell you, "Someday in the future. It could happen any day now. Just wait and be ready." Nothing more definite or specific? Can you imagine that? Think of all those different life events! What about Christmas? Imagine if you couldn't count down to it because you didn't know when it would actually occur! If it's hard to be patient now, just imagine! Our natural impatience would ramp up to a whole new level. You'd certainly be tempted to give up on waiting as the wait drags out agonizingly until some unknown point in the future.

...But isn't that what Jesus is asking you and me to do in Luke 12? ***"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet... You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*** Two thousand years ago, Jesus promised that he would come back, that he would return not to humbly live and die and rise again, but in glory to judge all people of all time, living and dead, and to bring his faithful believers to be with him body and soul in heaven forever. Yet when will he come back? We don't know. We just know that he's coming and he wants us to wait and be ready.

In fact, Jesus compares our waiting and watching and preparing to a household of servants who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding banquet. Now what you and I have experienced at modern wedding celebrations with the service and the reception and the dance doesn't hold a candle to the lengthy wedding celebrations they had in Jesus' day. If you were invited to the wedding celebration of a friend or loved one, you could expect to be at that party for several days eating and drinking and celebrating. At the same time, even for a wealthy man, there really was no fast and easy way to send word ahead to his servants so they could prepare for his return home. They basically had to stay prepared, ready for him to come home no matter the day or the hour of his arrival. He would expect them to open the door to his home as soon as he returned, so they would have to watch, to be ready, to wait for that indefinite amount of time to finally come to an end.

They would have to remain ready to serve with their lamps still burning even at the latest hours of the night. They would not know when he would return, but if he found them ready to serve? Well, there was great blessing for those who faithfully waited. ***"It will be good for those servants (literally ***"Blessed are those servants..."***) whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."***

Now that probably sounds rather strange. The master would become the servant to his servants and serve them? Keep in mind that when Jesus used earthly pictures to teach heavenly lessons, he used imagery that often defied even his hearers' experience. Masters didn't normally serve the servants, but looking farther down the path of Jesus' life and ministry, you can see how that very picture played out. On the night he was betrayed while he

was with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus—the Lord of heaven and earth—took on the role of the lowest slave and humbly washed his disciples' stinky, dirty feet. The Master became the servant not just then, but even became obedient to death, even death on a cross!

As Jesus speaks about how blessed are **“those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in”** the middle of the night, he says something that seems strange and even foreboding. **“But understand 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.”** What Jesus is doing here is emphasizing how indefinite the time of his return really is. Whether you think of it like servants waiting for their master no matter how long he is gone or how late he returns or like a homeowner constantly watching over his home just in case a thief breaks in, Jesus wants us to realize that the day of his return is coming, but we don't know when. We don't know what time and, frankly, we can't know until Jesus actually returns. For believers like you and me, the Last Day is going to be a great day, but for unbelievers, that day will be a terrifying day of judgement and condemnation.

So are you ready? Are you patiently waiting and watching for Christ's return? On this last Sunday of another Christian church year, it's a good time for you and me to see how really ready we are for Christ's return

Are you faithfully waiting and watching for what the Lord has in store for you, preparing yourself for each new day of grace with repentance and longing for the Master's return? Or have you grown complacent and lazy and unprepared, spiritually sleeping on the job and longing for what you plan to do tomorrow or next week or next month or next year?

If you and I were to look back on the past month or year or decade, we would see how unprepared we were when life didn't go the way we expected or when the Lord allowed the heavy burden of a cross or trouble or grief or sorrow to come into our lives. We would see how spiritually complacent we were when the Lord required active readiness. We would see how we have so often taken on a here-and-now what-I-want-when-I-want-it view of life, as opposed to a view of each year, each day, each breath as a gift of God's grace and an opportunity to get ready to see him return in glory. How often haven't you and I been caught unprepared when tragedy struck, bad news entered our homes, or change came in a way we didn't anticipate? How often haven't you and I been like the owner of a home who was unprepared when a thief broke into it? So how can you and I possibly be ready for Christ's return in glory?

Thankfully, the sermon doesn't end there. Your time of grace has not yet ended. Neither has mine. We are all still breathing. Christ is still on his way. Jesus spoke these words when he was getting ready to give his life for the sins of all. His disciples, though often warned, proved to be woefully unprepared, but still Jesus encouraged his disciples to **“be ready”** even though he knew they would fail him. Why? The Master loves his servants. The Lord cares for his people and wants them to be ready for when he comes back. Jesus explained, **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”**

Jesus wanted his disciples and wants us to be ready because he loves us and wants us to be with him in heaven forever. That love was so great that it brought him from heaven to earth as an infant in your place. That love brought him to suffering and the cross to pay with his own life for those times when you have been woefully unprepared for what God has allowed into your life. That love brought him to the grave you deserve for your sins and brought him out of the grave to guarantee your forgiveness and life.

That love took that good news of Jesus and spread it to every land and every tongue and every generation down to our own, year after year, decade after decade, century after century until it reached you. That love spoke to you through the very words of God and brought you from death to life through the waters of Holy Baptism. That love still comes to you through the Word and as Christ gives himself to you with bread and wine in his Holy Supper. That love has kept the Savior by your side through the good times and the bad, the sad times and the joyful ones, the times of guilt and grief, and times of forgiveness and blessedness. That love of Christ through his Word and Sacraments prepares you for a new life with him forever. That love of Christ readies you for the unknown, for the time he has given you whether much or little, for the crosses and the victories, for the ups and downs of life that lay before you in the foggy future.

Yes, it's hard to be patient, and the days and weeks to come will only emphasize that all the more as we rush towards Christmas. Yes, we have to wait until an indefinite day and time when Jesus will return in glory to bring us great blessing in the eternal glories of heaven. Yet we can wait and will wait because the love that Christ has shown for you enables you and me to wait patiently and eagerly and readily for his return. Blessed are those servants whom the Master finds ready and waiting for his return! Amen.