

“Life is Short”
Luke 12:32-40
August 8, 2010

I used to share an office with four guys. They were GUY guys - always up to no good—we had the whoopee cushions, the toilet papering of cars, the prank phone calls- but the longest lasting mischief was surprisingly simple. One guy left a note on his buddy’s desk. All it said was “Gotcha!” He did not DO anything, but his buddy got so paranoid - walking on eggshells for days, wondering when the prank was going to hit him. And what it would be. And who else may be there to witness it.

Passages like this one from Luke strike me in the same way. On the one hand, it begins with Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid, little flock ..." That is nice, right? It’s always nice when Jesus refers to us as his little flock. That’s the kind of message we like to hear at church. So, it is a shame he keeps talking. He goes on with images of being dressed for action, keeping your lamps "trimmed and burning," knowing what hour a thief is coming to break in. Those comments make ME paranoid. *Fear not, but you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.* OK? Is that something wonderful, or something scary? Is this a big "Gotcha!" note from God, to leave us walking on egg shells and on edge for the next twenty centuries, trembling with fear in anticipation for God knows what God knows when?

Well, I can allay your fears about the timeline for the Son of Man’s arrival. Just last week in the kitchen, Trudy Carter revealed that she knew when Jesus was coming back in case any of us were interested. She told us that according to the internet, it would be May 12th. She has since corrected that to May 21st. With a sigh of relief, Rose responded that she was glad to know the date because she’d gotten ready so many times before. That piqued my curiosity. So, I asked her HOW exactly has she gotten ready. To which she replied, “I’ve packed my bags for someplace warm.” See what you miss when you stay out of the kitchen?

It is a puzzlement, this Second Coming. When will it be? What will it be like? Will it be terrible and scary, or we will we get a pass on the chaos as we float up to heaven like a big beautiful balloon? Some preachers would tell you that it will be about judgment with a capital J, so you’d better get your act together. Jesus is coming, and boy, is he mad. He just can’t wait to catch all of us sinners being up to no good so that he can sentence us to someplace warm for all of eternity. I don’t know about all that. Oh, Jesus will come back and judgment will be his. But, I am not sure that speculation about when the end might come is relevant at least to our human minds because we cannot fathom the wonder of it all. Our natural response to God’s kingdom coming to fruition is to be afraid; and fear of ‘being caught’ is not faith. Really.

How could it possibly be enough to just not sin because you are afraid of hell? Is that why Jesus came – to scare us out of sin? I think not. He showed us how to struggle with the tension between what we want to do and what we ought to do – that’s when we grow. Faith is more than sin management. Thank God for that because that means that God is more than the managing disciplinarian. In fact, Jesus tells us what it is that God wants to do, and it is not divine spanking. He says, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” That’s what God wants to do. So, could it be that the message of the Second Coming is NOT “be ready so that you stay out of hell,” but “be ready because blessings are on the way.”

It seems to me that that might lead to a better way of living – life as preparation for God’s blessings. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! I don’t know about you, but I get worn out with sour puss Christians – those for whom faith brings such little joy – such little love. In our book

study this summer, our author, James Moore gives a good description – he says, “I know a man who claims to be very religious. Many people regard him as a man of great faith. He can quote scripture with the best of them. He can rattle off important dates in church history. He can recite creeds eloquently. He can spout high-sounding theology in the air. But I’m not impressed. I’ve seen how he treats his wife and children. I’ve seen how he treats his neighbors and those who work for him. He is hostile and critical.” That’s a sour puss Christian – one who can speak the language of salvation but whose living reveals more bitterness than joy. Christianity is not a set of rules to quote. It’s not just knowing the facts. It is not just something we need to memorize and vocalize and throw a little money towards every now and again.

Jesus’ disciples haven’t figured that out. They act like they have forever. They’re worried about the wrong things, chasing what’s unimportant. *Lord, Mary ought not have wasted that perfume on you. Lord, who will sit at your right and left? Lord, are we there yet? Can you tell us when exactly you are going to be king?* They run around forgetting why they started doing what they’re doing in the first place. But, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. He wants the disciples to make good decisions. He clearly says, “Get it right, you guys, come on! Life is not long, and you are selling God short. Don’t you know that the treasure in heaven is so much more than you can fit in your purse? Come on! We’re talking about GOD here, and you are putting your attention and even your adoration on things that don’t matter. Life is too short.”

Brett Younger is a professor at McAfee School of Theology. He tells the story of visiting DC with his wife. They went on a walking tour and it was one of those blazing hot summer days. He asked, “Carol, would we rather go to the National Archives and be moved by the Declaration of Independence or to McDonald’s to buy a couple of Cokes?” They had that feeling of making a poor choice, but not caring – the cokes were really cold! In retrospect, he says life is too short to skip the Declaration of Independence. He’s right. Life is too short for coffee in a Styrofoam cup. Life is too short to keep waiting for a vacation, a special occasion, or a better day. Life is too short to sit around moping, choosing despair, or worrying what people think. Life is too short to complain about those you don’t like, look for revenge, or spend your precious time trying to convince someone who wants to live in resentment to do otherwise. Life is too short to be bitter over things you cannot change. Life is too short to be bored. Life is too short to skip worship, leave good words unsaid, be afraid of change. Life is too short to intend to live a new life but never get around to it. We should never give ourselves to things which are less than God’s best or surrender ourselves to the values of this world because life is too short.

God IS coming back, and we ought to be getting ready...we ought to be filling our lives with good things just like you fill your home with good things when someone you love comes to stay. You see, I believe when God comes back, things are going to be put right, and if we’ve done our job, that ought to be joyful news for us. When we think of the Second Coming, we should burst out into Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king! Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing! Party at God’s house! That is what we are getting ready for. Something wonderful. Something beyond our wildest dreams. Just think of the joy we could find in preparing for THAT! Just think of how much fun we could have preparing for THAT. Just think of the questions we could ask each other...Do you think God will like what we’ve done with the old place? Have we forgotten anything? Do you think we have invited enough people to the party? Do you think we’ve done our research? Do we know enough about him to have appropriate dinner conversation? Are we comfortable enough with who he is to be relaxed and not stumbling all over ourselves with nervousness? Have we done what he has asked us to do? Have we taken care of all that he left in our safekeeping? Do you

think he will notice attention to detail – you know, the ways we’ve tried to pretty up the world for him – the candles we’ve lit to light the dark corners, the dusting that we’ve done to wipe away the problems of the past, the pieces of our lives that we’ve decided to shine and polish and put on display for all the world to see, the trash we’ve taken out and the flowers we’ve set out? What is our response when God says, “Hey, y’all, I’m back. Are you ready to party?”

I hope our response is “Yeah, we’re ready! Joy to the World! Let us receive our king!” That’s the only message I’ve got for you this morning. Don’t waste what the good Lord has given you. It is his good pleasure to give us, to give US, the kingdom. So, let’s get ready. Life is short, stay alert, be prepared, light the lamps, listen for the knock, answer the call, and serve where you’re sent. Life is short, do what you love to do and give it your very best. Whether it’s business or teaching or farming or government or sales, if you don’t love what you’re doing and can’t give it your best, think seriously about getting out of it. Life is short, let us get ready for God by going to church, worshiping, singing, and taking care of this day. Life is short so let us get ready for God by telling the truth, listening to the people you love and telling them how much they mean to you. Life is short, so recognize that every day is a special occasion, choose to be happy. Life is short, so forgive. Look past the faults of others just like you hope they will for you. Life is short, so surround yourself with gracious people, hug your friends, and care for someone you haven’t cared for. Life is short, so be courageous, take a chance, live so that when your life flashes before your eyes, you’ll have plenty to watch. Life is short, so embrace the possibilities, try something new, see that every day is an opportunity. Dream, but don’t just dream, follow those dreams. Life is short, so breathe and think deeply, don’t give your heart to that which won’t fill your heart. Life is short, so get ready for the kingdom, tell a friend how God’s love has changed your life, be a person who talks about Jesus, and invite them to the party.

The great American poet Dr. Seuss wrote, *How did it get so late so soon, It’s night before it’s afternoon. December is here before it’s June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?* There is a party on its way. Trudy says it is May 12th or May 21st. Rose says she’s packing her bags. And, maybe they are on to something. Maybe the spirit that makes them smile with those words and laugh out loud is the spirit of the party. So, let’s get ready. Pray hard, believe in Christ with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, live a true life for Jesus. Celebrate the love of God, get a life, because it’s later than you think and life is short.