

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of Holy Eucharist
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost; August 11, 2019

“Already Here”

Scripture: Luke 12:32-40 and Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 (9 Pentecost C, Proper 14. RCL)

I can only hope you'll forgive me if I appear a little nervous today. The Bible says that Jesus is coming like a thief, unexpected. *Surprise!* And I have to admit I'm a little bit jumpy. I mean, it's kind of lousy to be worried all the time that Jesus might just show up at the least opportune moment and interrupt our very busy lives. That can keep you on edge, right? I don't know about you, but I know I'm *not* always up to the right thing. And maybe I'm *not* always doing what Jesus wants me to do. And I *haven't* fixed all the problems in the world. And I'm not even sure how to begin. And I'm so worried that I'm not doing enough in these challenging times. So it's a little disconcerting when I realize that he could show up any minute, and I won't be ready, and I won't be confident, and I won't be good. And it's just a lousy way to live, worried that Jesus could show up, you know, any second.

But I can think of an even lousier way to live... and that's to not be worried at all. To become so complacent, so disinterested, so tuned out, so depressed or overwhelmed in these difficult times as to give up on the Savior entirely. Or to forget that we are called to look out for him... at every moment. Called to expect to see

him... any time, any where, in the best of times or the worst of times. Called somehow to work for him no matter how small or seemingly insignificant our efforts. Called to be ready for him to show up. Called to hold out peace and love and hope every day... and to resist despair and prejudice and apathy and fear.

To forget that we are on duty here, and that our supervisor may just stop by to check in on our performance... well, that seems a pretty meaningless state of affairs for a faithful Christian. Better to live with some urgency than with a false sense of security. Better to look out for Jesus than to give up the watch or to forget that, as we tell our TEC teenagers, Christ is *counting on us*.

But you know the best way to not have to be on our guard all the time is to just... be about our business as followers of Jesus. It's funny in this little teaching that Jesus doesn't require much from us other than to be looking for him, ready to see him at work in the world around us. And how do we do that? Turn our possessions to alms, Jesus says. Lay up our treasures in heaven. That is where to put our trust. "Be dressed for action." "Have our lamps lit." And what might that lit lamp look like? How about... Don't miss an opportunity to comfort the distressed. Or heal the broken hearted. Or share what we have. Or tell the truth. In doing these entirely

possible things, we may well open the door for Jesus to enter our own lives and the lives of others.

But remember, we probably won't fix everything that ails us. We may not see the results we long for in short order. Bad actors will still demand our attention. And the struggles of life will still continue. But we are people of faith, and remember that "...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Author Michael Ventura once said that in these times of what seems a...

"...new Middle Ages, times of plague, famine, violence, extreme class disparity, and religious fanaticism... If you choose... you are entrusted with passing along something of value through a dark, crazy time - preserving your integrity, in your own way, by your acts and your very breathing... for those who build again ... as this chaos exhausts itself."

I think that's a little like what Jesus is asking of us. Be on the alert. Do what is good. Act with integrity. Pass along good values. Share hope for healing and the future. Of all our works as followers of Christ, perhaps the most urgent, the most difficult, and the most powerful of all is faith in the healing from God that must surely come. As God says in today's psalm: *"Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me; but to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God."*

Now, maybe you're not one of those people who exactly subscribe to the idea that Jesus is just going to come again, sort of pop in, surprise us, and check up on us. And I understand that. The world has been a long time waiting. But, I would suggest that... whenever we encounter someone who needs a kind word or a helping hand, Jesus is right there knocking at the doors of our houses. And when we have a chance to share hope and healing and compassion with people who need it, he's already standing at our door. And if we value our own lives and possessions so much as to be unwilling to act at all for the well-being of the oppressed, the poor, the broken-hearted, he's banging on our doors. No need to glance over our shoulders. In times like these, the eyes of faith may see that Jesus is already here. We just need to join him in whatever way we can to be about God's business.