

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

7th August 2022 – Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:32-40

MADE READY. LIVE READY.

Don't be afraid. Don't worry about it. It'll all be ok. Is there or has there been any one in your life who has said those words to you a lot? Perhaps they were the soothing words of your childhood, when a parent, grandparent or someone you trusted said them to you when you were sick, afraid of a storm, or upset when someone had died. Maybe you have a spouse or close friend who says those words to you regularly to calm or soothe you. They could be words you've heard from a doctor when you or someone you love is facing treatment or an operation. When they are spoken from someone we trust they are words of assurance, of peace, of calm, words which assure us that they we can move forward and continue because it will all work out ok.

'Don't be afraid', are the words of comfort Jesus gives to the disciples at the beginning of today's Gospel reading. Apparently, the assurance to 'not be afraid' is given 50 times in the Bible. In our reading for today from Genesis 15 God says to Abraham, 'Don't be afraid' when He comes to Abraham in a vision. Over the years whenever at Christmas time with young children I've gone through at the story of the angel visiting Mary, as the angel greets Mary with, 'Don't be afraid, the Lord is with you', I say to the children, 'would you be afraid if an angel came to you like that?' They think for a bit, and you can see them considering, 'well, an angel is from God, and God is good, so I shouldn't be afraid', and so they nervously shake their heads, 'no, I wouldn't be afraid'. And then I say, 'well, I'd be afraid if an angel came to me like that!', and then the more honest of them then say, 'oh well, I would be afraid then too!'

'Don't be afraid'; words of assurance, words of comfort. Words which give us peace and security when they come from someone we trust.

This Gospel reading we have here today brings out themes which we are more used to hearing either at the end of the Church year in November or the beginning of Advent in

November/December. The warnings it has to ‘be ready’ are similar to what we hear in Matthew 25 with the sheep and goats, and the wise and foolish bridesmaids, or in Mark 13 with the signs of the end times. Having this reading pop up now, almost unexpectedly, is a reminder that this ‘be ready’ warning is with us all the time. We don’t know when the time will come; whether it is the second coming of Jesus, or the end of our own life on earth. The warning here is strong; be ready. And when we look at or hear readings like this it is often the strong warnings which draw our attention, which we remember. Some Christian churches, and some other religions, focus a lot on these end times, trying to predict when and how they will happen, even using them to scare people into faith so they don’t find themselves unprepared when it happens. The message which is both preached and remembered whenever we talk about Jesus’ return is often based on the warning of, ‘you better be ready, or else!’, and sometimes people even use wars, or comets, or natural or political events, to predict the exact time of Jesus’ return. Jesus’ call to ‘be ready’ is very often based around the warning to ‘watch out’.

But have a look again at how this reading begins. How does Jesus start it here? ‘My little group of disciples, don't be afraid! Your Father wants to give you the kingdom.’ (v.32) Before the warning, comes the assurance. And even though it is only one sentence, that forms the foundation for everything else which follows. When it comes to the call to ‘be ready!’, Jesus gives us the assurance that we have already been ‘made ready’. And just like when we were a child we probably trusted our mother or father when they said, ‘don’t be afraid, it’ll all be ok’, we know we can trust Jesus when He gives us this assurance here. When Jesus says that our Father wants to give us the kingdom, He knows that’s true because the death and resurrection He was heading towards at this time would guarantee that. His words, ‘don’t be afraid’ aren’t just an empty promise, or a wish or desire, they are statement of fact that through our faith in what has been done for us in Jesus we have been made ready. God’s desire is that we are ready, we are saved. Simply by faith we accept what He has done for us.

We are made ready, which takes us to the bulk of what Jesus is saying here, the second part of our theme, we are now called to 'Live Ready'. This is something which is talked about a lot in the Bible, and in this case Jesus is talking about where we put our priorities, our treasure, our hearts. How do we view and use all the gifts God has given to us: in service to Him, or do we allow them to take us away from Him? Last week we talked about who we are influenced by, keeping our eyes and our hope fixed above and beyond what is here on earth. Here Jesus speaks in a similar way, telling us not to find our hope, our meaning, our purpose, on the things which we own or have here, but to have our treasure in heaven, in the love, forgiveness and new life we have with Him.

It's always a hard one, isn't it? A bit confronting. God has given us many gifts to enjoy, and we are meant to enjoy them. But how do we know when we have the balance of enjoying God's gifts and allowing them to become our 'treasure', allowing them to become between Him and us, how do we know when that balance is out of whack? We know we are made ready, we have that assurance in our lives through God's Word, through our Baptism, through Holy Communion. Having been made ready, how do we know if we are doing what Jesus says when He tells us to live ready?

There's no magic formula, or equation, or test, or questionnaire for this. It's about where our hearts are, so it's between us and God. The call from teachings like the one Jesus is giving us here is to have an honest look at what we truly treasure, what we value most, and how these things stand in relation to our relationship with God. One thing I read this week suggested looking at your bank statement to see where you spend the most money, or at your calendar to see where you spend most of your time. That can be helpful, but it's not everything. For many of us a lot of our money is spent on the essentials of life for ourselves and our family; food, housing, electricity, transport. That doesn't mean we put these things above God, but actually that we are using God's gifts in the way He wants us to. Much of our time for many of us is spent in work, or caring for others. Again, not direct God things, but still doing what God calls us to do.

Live ready. There is no set formula or breakdown for this, just the call; the call to be ready which is based on the assurance that you have been made ready. In fact, when we look at it like that, it is a call to how we live our life as people who have been saved, who have been assured of the kingdom through our faith. The call to be honest with ourselves, and with God, about what we truly treasure. The call to examine how we use what we are given. The call to use what we have in service to God and His people. As people who are saved, Jesus' words, 'So always be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come' (v. 40) are more of a reminder than a warning; a reminder that this work is always ongoing, that our service as members of God's kingdom is to be a part of our lives each day.

Made Ready. Live Ready. A comfort, and a call. Know whose you are, and live in the assurance of His words 'don't be afraid' in what you face each day. Knowing that, honestly open your heart up to God, asking Him to help you to put all of your hope and trust in Him, so that your treasure is truly to be found in all that He wants to give to you. Amen.

FOR FURHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Made Ready

- What do the assurances God gives that you are made ready in Jesus mean to you?
- How do you experience them?
- Even though you may not think of it too often, does it make a difference to you knowing that through Jesus you are always ready for when Jesus comes again?
- How would your life, and your outlook on life, be different if you didn't have this sure comfort and assurance to rely on?

Live Ready

- What does Jesus' call to live like you are ready mean to you?
- Are there parts of this you struggle with, parts of your life which you know don't have the focus or priority they should but which you struggle to change?
- Pray about any struggles you have, read God's promises to you in the Bible, remember your baptism, receive Holy Communion. In all of these things remember who God has made you to be, how He has called you to be, and ask Him help you to live as a child of His kingdom.

Pray: thank God for all that He has done for us in Jesus, and that we are now ready for when we meet Him, however that may be. Ask God to help us to live as members of His kingdom, to stay close to Him, and in our lives to bear witness to the hope and life we now have in Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
07.08.2022*