

“Get Ready...”

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost – August 7, 2022 – Luke 12:32-40/C

When I first became a stepmom, I had to learn a lot of new things. One morning, I came down to the kitchen to find our 6 year old standing on the kitchen counter, having opened up the drawers below and stepping his way up to his perch. He was proud of himself – I was terrified that he would fall to his death. After cautioning him not to move, I whisked him off his counter perch and placed him safely on the kitchen floor. I do remember having to catch my breath before trying to explain why his early morning counter climb was not a good idea! Later, recounting the tale to a classmate (who also happened to have little ones of their own) and expecting some commiseration, I was blown away by the insight of his advice. “*Put the cereal on a lower shelf.*” It was not the last blinding flash of the obvious I have had over the years – and it always brings a chuckle that the most obvious answers can make us relax about our moments of terror (real or imagined) and laugh at how simply great big issues can be resolved.

Take God, for example. For those of us who have been hanging out in the church for awhile, it seems that nothing is ever simple. Rules are too strict. Judgment continues to thrive and as good Lutherans we join Brother Martin often in his quest, which he put into the words, “How can I find favor with God?” Well, let me be as clear and simple as I can. “You cannot find favor with God, because God already loves you no matter what.” No matter what you do, no matter how you achieve, no matter even if you are a nice person, nothing will get you into a better position with God than you are already in. Right now, this moment, present tense. God loves you better than you love yourself. God loves you, and there is nothing you can do about it!

Now that I have cleared that up for you (wink) let’s talk about getting into a space where you can relax in that knowledge and stop being afraid of losing, of failing, of being abandoned, or whatever lurks at the edges of your worry zones. I humbly offer today three phrases that come from our three Bible passages this morning. Perhaps they will ease your anxiety about eternal life, and daily life with God as you experience it on this side of heaven.

I: From Genesis – Believe God’s Promises - I’m the person who is still wearing a tee shirt that says “Believe” in trademark Royals’ script. It came from the 2014 season, and the more I wore it, the better they played. But believing in something unbelievable is not as easy as it might sound, and I had to put in a lot of hours in that tee before there was a return on my investment!

The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision – which was not an unusual experience for Abram at this point, and it should have been enough. But like so many of us who truly want to be faithful to God – even **after** signs, visions and God winks – we hesitate, we argue, we protect ourselves from being hurt if we risk our trust.

Up until the end of this story, it seems, Abram’s been testing God, to see if God could really do what He said, so that he might start to trust. But will Abram evolve? Will he grow? Will he mature? There’s a hint here: The process isn’t just about what you do, but also about who you grow into. The process of waiting is not just about what you get in life, it’s about who you become in life. So, trust the process!

You know, it wasn’t until God brought Abram outside, turned his face up to towards the night sky and asked him to count the stars, that Abram believed. In essence, Abram got just a tiny peek at what we have been seeing of God’s created universe via the James Webb

Space Telescope, and it took the sheer glory and magnificence of the heavens for Abram (and us) to succumb to even imagining how God can turn the impossible into the possible.

Point #1: If God promises, Believe it.

II: From Hebrews – The Power of Faith – *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... (By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.)* In a sense, faith is the **evidence** that we believe. It is the by-product of our surrender to the fact that God is God and we are not.

By faith: Abraham obeyed and trusted in his promised inheritance from God

By faith: He lived as a nomad, anticipating a home whose foundation God was laying

By faith: His elderly body and his barren wife were given power to conceive children

And in faith: Abraham's descendants looked forward as they waited – not yearning for the past they had left, but leaning in toward the something better God had promised them. Then, in God's perfect time – Abraham received his inheritance, his homeland, and his descendants – *as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* **Point #2: No matter how long it takes, Have Faith.**

III: From Luke – Get Ready – *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give YOU the kingdom.* How often have you wasted time with worry and preparations to protect yourself from whatever uncertainly the future may bring? How's your 401K? Will your children have done enough to secure their own college scholarships? Is your career still waiting for take-off? Have you found "the one"? Have you found the answer to the meaning of your life?

The world is not so simple, eh? The cultures that surround us and the people who walk with us are not as kind as we remember in our childhoods. There is much to fear, and many to avoid, lest we open ourselves to the awkwardness and pain of allowing others to live the lives they are making for themselves, and **not** the ones we wish they would live. "*Be reasonable, see it My Way*" was on a little bookmark I had in, maybe, 4th grade. (Some things never change!)

But while we exhaust ourselves in what people think of us, how we are measuring up, if the Jones have surpassed what we couldn't even hope to keep up with and the world around us isn't doing what we want it to do – God has a plan for you and your life...and it is incredibly simple. One of the Pastors in our Text Study group last week dropped this great thought on us: "*Do you feel that God is far away from your life? Well, guess who moved?!*" Yep.

Ran across this comment on today's Gospel from theologian Alyce McKenzie: *There is a thief who steals and destroys—and there is a Thief who saves... God's Holy Thief is a burglar...[who] returns to steal our false priorities and overturn our unjust structures. When he breaks into our house, we will never be the same.* **Point #3: Get Ready for what's to come.** The simple, blinding flash of the obvious for us. All of our troubles and worries and anxieties and confusions can be dissolved when we resolve to take this Biblical Three Step Program seriously: 1. Believe God's Promises. 2. Live in Faith. 3. Get Ready for **New** Life.

Someone asked the office this week how to get some information that we have put out there literally dozens of times over every communication vehicle we have. The solution to this person's problem had been in front of them, literally, for years. When I heard the request my first internal response to "*How can I find information on...?*" was "*First, you have to listen.*" It's simple really. And it starts with that one word. Listen. Listen to the preacher. Listen to the teacher. Listen to your spouse, your friend, that neighbor who drives you nuts.

Listen to your children. Listen to your heart. Listen to what God has been telling you a hundred times a day in a thousand different ways.

I came across an amazingly accurate description of a preacher the other day. If I were going to get a tattoo, I think it would be this: "*My calling is to love the Scriptures in public.*" Let your only treasure be that you are in love with the God you find in the stars of the night sky, in the patience to find your place that feels like home, in the joy of family and community, and in the companionship of the word of God that you live in the midst of: the Living Word that speaks in whispers and loving thoughts toward each other. The Messiah who cannot get enough of your company. The Treasure of your inheritance of the Kingdom of God – which was given to you as it is given to Nolan today – in the waters of Holy Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It's not rocket science, people – it's incredibly simple – really. Believe God's promise. Live in Faith. Get Ready for New Life, every day. Why would you do anything else? Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS

Notes: Alice McKenzie, "Mise en Place: Reflections on Luke 12:32-40," *Patheos*, 8.1.13; Christopher Davis for *Working Preacher.org* 8.7.22; Lauren Winner at *Festival of Homiletics*