

Luke 12:32-40

August 19, 2007 – 12th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray

† **Unafraid** (vv.32-34)

† **Ready for service** (vv.35-40)

In the name of Jesus, our loving Lord and Master, dear fellow disciples:

Is it just me, or do you agree that something about being prepared seems to go against the grain of our American culture? It amazed me as a boy how often couples got caught on the rocks when the tide came in and cut them off from the land. The Coast Guard often had to go out and rescue them. But then once in a summer biology class our instructor got very nervous hurrying us in our slippery tennis shoes over the seaweed and past the tide pools. We stayed a little too long on the island. And what was with those kayakers up in Alaska in the movie, *The Guardian*? The Coast Guard rescuers had to swim through a narrow opening to find the two. And the injured kayaker could not even swim!

For so many things, however, no amount of preparation is ever enough. Rescue swimmers sometimes must decide who to leave behind. In spite of all their training rescuers die too. But we don't have to worry about a flood again or global warming, for that matter. It's the global burning of Judgment Day for which we need Christ to prepare us. **Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray.**

† **Unafraid** (vv.32-34)

Jesus says, "***Do not be afraid...***" So are you "afraid"? It's easy to be brave driving fast on good stretch of pavement with the engine of your new pickup purring along. Leather seats and a sweet stereo can give you such a sense of security that soon your lack of fear has you nodding off. Suddenly you jerk, the tires skid, and fear overwhelms you too late. The truck smashes through the guard rail and flips over completely, landing in the ditch pointed the other way. No matter how long you worked or how much it cost you, neither the truck nor the money can prevent accidents. Money and possessions make lousy gods because they cannot even guard themselves. Yet you can tell how we worship them by how hard it is to come to worship and hear God's Word compared to driving up north to enjoy God's creation which humanists insist evolved by itself. We too are far too worldly. By nature we "***worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.***" (Romans 1:25) For this reason every one of us could be very much afraid when our Creator returns as Judge to burn up all these things we love and in which we tend to trust. How quickly and eternally fear will rise on that last, dreadful day.

But God does not want it to be that way for us. So Jesus adds some beautiful promises to His command. He heard Adam's first excuse at the beginning in the Garden: "***I was afraid***" (Genesis 3:10), said the first man in his naked shame of sin. But Jesus came as the promised Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. On the night of His birth the angel told the trembling shepherds, "***Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.***" (Luke 2:10) Now Jesus says, "***Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.***" Living under God's rule of peace in the security of sins forgiven takes away our fear. And we need not think of doing, thinking or feeling anything to get it because it is our Father's good pleasure "***to give***" us His kingdom.

Jesus tells how to triumph over materialistic fear: "***Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***" Knowing that pickups roads cannot survive the fires of Judgment Day devalues riches since thieves and insects are always trying to devour them. Since our heavenly Father gives us His kingdom out of His pure grace and mercy for Jesus' sake, it changes our *afraid*-fear into *respect*-fear, the good and

healthy “fear of the Lord.” We want to please Him in every way, every day. That’s faith for you, living and active and eager to do good – **Unafraid**. What pleases God, that pleases me for Jesus’ sake.

† **Ready for service (vv.35-40)**

“Dressed and ready for service” was an easy picture for Jesus’ fellow Jews to understand. Masters attended wedding banquets late into the night. Without limos and cell phones, slaves had to stay up late watching to let the master in when he returned. Jesus makes this into a picture of preparedness for that dark night when the last trumpet sounds and Christ returns as the Judge of the living and the dead.

“Be dressed ready for service....” Some of you may remember that the old King James Version of the Bible translated: *“Gird up your loins.”* In the days when men wore robes everyone understood that. You may notice sometimes if your pastor wears a robe, that it’s easy to walk up the inside of the robe, tripping on it up steps. So he has to pull it up. But notice, this exposes mud on his shoes or tears in his pants. When we *“gird up our loins”* for service in Christ’s kingdom, we expose our weaknesses and fears for everyone to see. But to hide behind our church membership or religiosity is hypocrisy. Our Savior wants us open and honest about our weaknesses, trusting in Him, **Ready for service**.

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.” Jesus won’t need anyone to open the door when He comes as the almighty Judge with all His holy angels. He’s trying to impress on us the readiness factor of faith. You can tell by the strange twist He gives the story at the end. Jesus will react to faithful readiness unlike any earthly master. He says, *“It will be good for 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.”*

Doesn’t that take our service of Christ and His saints to a whole different level? You struggle to come early for your service as usher. It’s more work than anyone knows to finish those deserts when you’re so tired Saturday night. Mowing the lawn and cleaning the church take so much out of you after all the other responsibilities that keep piling up at work and at home. But Jesus sees everything done out of thankful faith and fully intends to give it a totally undeserved reward of grace. He plans to serve us at the great wedding banquet of heaven just as He washed His disciples’ feet.

Knowing Jesus is **Ready for service** makes us all the more eager to heed His warnings and keep things in perspective here on earth as we press on toward heaven. *“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. 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. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”* Grace gives a whole new perspective on life.

A father was shocked at his son’s neat room with a note on the pillow. With trembling hands he read, “Dear Dad: It is with great regret and sorrow that I’m writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I find real passion with Stacy and she is so nice. I knew you would not approve because of her piercings, tattoos, motorcycle gear and she’s so much older. But, Dad, she’s pregnant. Stacy says we’ll be happy in her trailer with enough firewood for winter. We dream of more children. Stacy opened my eyes that marijuana doesn’t hurt anyone. We can grow it and trade it with neighbors for cocaine and ecstasy while we pray for a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it. Don’t worry Dad. I’m 15 and can take care of myself. Someday we’ll let you meet your grandchildren. Love, Your Son John....P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I’m over at Tommy’s house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than a report card. That’s in my center desk drawer. I love you. Call me when it’s safe to come home.”

Trusting in Jesus who washed away our sins and shame, we’re always safe to come home. Amen.