

Text: Luke 12:35-40

Purpose: that the hearers more vigilantly anticipate Jesus's return in 2023

We're on the edge of our seats. A new year is near. The question, however, is what kind of year will 2023 be like. Blessings? Curses? Who knows? I really should have gotten around to taking crystal ball class at Seminary!

One thing remains the same as with any other new year; it's an opportunity to evaluate the good and maybe not so good habits we're living out and make adjustments accordingly. New Year's resolution sort of stuff.

Our lists might include reading more, eating less, exercising more, cussing less, saving more, spending less, cooking more, whatever – I don't want to write your resolutions for you. This is though an ideal time to evaluate your life – the good, the bad, the ugly – and respond accordingly.

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Jesus offers an additional resolution for our consideration. Simply put, Jesus challenges us to **anticipate** His second coming.

Anticipate is a strong word. A shortstop will anticipate the ball being hit their way every play; they bend their knees to get closer to the ground and place their gloves in a ready position.

What then does it mean for us to anticipate the second coming of Jesus? Obviously it means being ready, but in what way?

Jesus offers a straightforward process by which we anticipate His arrival. It begins with **dressing appropriately, employing the tools of readiness, opening the door to the Master, and receiving the reception of the Master**. Dressing, employing, opening, and receiving.

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First off, *dressing appropriately*. The servants in the parable dress for action. Their Master will return from a party, and they need to greet him when he returns. In other words, they're on the clock even though the Master isn't at the premises. They're expected to look like and act like servants even while the Master is away.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ...”¹ How do we wear Jesus? Paul explains: “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”

If I asked you what a hippie looks like, how would you describe them? Tie-dye shirt. Long hair. Sandals. Their outward appearance identifies a hippie as a hippie.

Same goes for those who are in the process of anticipating Jesus coming back. They look like people who use their bodies to benefit their neighbor. Sex is an experience for a married male and female to build one another up. Anticipating Christ means you won’t use sex to exploit another human by demanding nudes on your phone.

The sex stuff makes sense, but Paul really hits close to home because Christians are the kind of people who don’t relish fighting or ghosting friends and family.

Then Paul says Christians don’t look like people who get swept away by jealousy. What percentage of our New Year’s resolutions have we come up with because we want what other people have: a thinner body; the perfect children; the newest car; an organized home.

Anticipating Jesus by dressing appropriately like the servants waiting for their Master means demonstrating a way of life that honors the name and teachings of the 2nd Person of the Trinity.

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But the servants are more than just their uniforms in the parable; they also keep their lamps burning. In other words, they employ the tools of readiness.

After Jesus and the Disciples finished the first Lord’s Supper, they traveled to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus commanded Peter, James, and John to stay awake, but Jesus also told them to pray as they waited.

Prayer isn’t the only tool of readiness, but it’s definitely a significant one. When the servants in the parable wait for their Master, they assume he will return. Despite their physical distance from their Master, they understood that they belonged to the Master, and the Master belonged to them.

¹ Romans 13:13-14

Prayer is like an old satellite dish. When it's pointed in the right direction, you receive a wide array of TV channels you can watch. Prayer directs us toward God and away from ourselves.

But we're directed towards a God who is wildly active and present through prayer. The old hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," goes:

What a friend we have in Jesus / All our sins and griefs to bear

It goes on in verse 3:

Are we weak and heavy laden / Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge / Take it to the Lord in prayer

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? / Take it to the Lord in prayer

In His arms He'll take and shield thee / Thou wilt find a solace there

Prayer is a tool of readiness just as the lamps were in the parable because prayer connects you to the God who listens and responds to you despite the distance. The conversation we have in prayer now, anticipates the fuller and deeper and personal conversations we will have once Jesus returns – when we see Him face-to-face.

So we clothe ourselves appropriately, we employ the tools of readiness like prayer, and then we will open the door to the Master.

A Bible scholar wrote: "The divine visitor knocks and calls. The house owner does not open to a knock but to a familiar voice. The hearing of the beloved voice inspires the opening of the locked door."

The servants received the Master. His inviting voice moves people who we'd have a hard time classifying as Christians.

One of my favorite parts of ministry is to see people melt in anticipation of receiving the Lord's Supper – especially homebound or people in nursing homes. They're no longer the gruff person or the dying person. Jesus knocks at the door through me, and their anger, crankiness, woe-is-me attitudes evaporate. They're simply servants, innocent as children, waiting to receive Christ. When I enter homes and

nursing facilities, they extend their hands – they open the door – to their true Master, Jesus.

This parable has Jesus's Second Return in mind. It will be a major moment. Are you anticipating it?

If you're not, there are ways to go about anticipating the Return, because Jesus knocks to enter on little doors. He knocks and welcomes us to baptism. Will you open the door? He knocks and welcomes us to His teaching in Holy Scripture. Will you open the door by engaging the Holy Writings? Jesus knocks and welcomes us to love our neighbor – who may or may not be our enemy; will you help? Jesus connected care to our neighbors as care to Him personally. In other words, you help somebody in need then you simultaneously serve Jesus.

There is no shortage of mini-doors Jesus knocks on and speaks at for you to open. Opening these doors trains us to anticipate when Jesus knocks at the Greater Door upon His return.

Dress appropriately because our actions reflect Jesus; employ the tools of readiness like prayer, and open the door to the opportunities God has given to you in order to train yourself to anticipate Jesus's return.

The last step is receiving the reception of the Master. It's easy to miss, but when the Master returns in the parable, he dresses himself like one of the servants and he will "come and serve them." It's topsy turvy! Masters don't serve their workers! Unless of course, the Master in the parable is Jesus.

The entirety of Jesus's ministry focused on serving; it's odd though because Jesus, the Son of God, has rank. But that doesn't stop Him from healing diseases (free of charge), or teaching – teachings the people desperately needed.

And then there's the cross – the essence of servanthood. He not only died for your sins and the sins of the world. He forgave His opponents. He arranged a place for His mother Mary to stay while He was bleeding out. He served friend and foe from the cross.

As great as these moments of servitude are, they will pale in comparison to the ultimate meal Jesus will serve you when He transfers you to the New Heavens and New Earth. We hinted at that meal on Christmas Eve.

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As we anticipate the return of Christ we dress appropriately – living in such a way that honors the Son; it means praying – being connected to the God you will eventually get to speak to face to face; it means opening the doors Jesus is knocking at right now and in the future; and it means receiving the reception of the Master, Jesus.

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New Year's resolutions are important, but I think it's helpful to remember that most of our resolutions shape us in this life only. Exercise is good, but it can't help you escape the 'D' word.

But the habit of anticipating Jesus's return equips us to enter a new world that will never end; a new world where we are communally and individually served by the Master, God Himself. Amen.