



# TRI-PARISH MAIL MINISTRY

Grace                      Peace                      St. Paul's  
Valentine                  Mission                      White River

## The Last Sunday in Trinity

November 24, 2024

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 45

Hymns: 16; 446; 608

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 35:3-10  
Revelation 7:9-17

**Sermon Topic:** Faithfulness, Jesus' Second Coming, Vigilance

**In Jesus' Name!**

**Text:** Luke 12:35-43 NKJV

***“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?” And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.***

In Christ Jesus, who will return at the end of time, dear fellow redeemed:

In December 1941 the Imperial Army of the Empire of Japan invaded the Philippines. By February 1942 the situation had grown hopeless for the 55,000 American and Philippine troops defending the islands. The Japanese navy was in control of the seas and their armies were approaching Manila. President Franklin Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to evacuate. As MacArthur left he uttered what has become a famous quote: “I shall return!” His return was by no means assured. For many of the American and Philippine soldiers left behind and imprisoned by the Japanese, that return came too late. Yet, by virtue of the industrial power of the United States, the military might of Allied forces, and the intervention of almighty God, MacArthur was able to keep his promise. By July 1945 the Philippines were once again in Allied hands.

A much greater Commander made that same promise to return two thousand years ago. While Jesus has not yet returned, His return is not in doubt. Jesus has been given *“all authority...in heaven and on earth”* (Mt. 28:18). Paul tells us: *“He (that is, God the Father) raised Him (that is, Jesus) from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet”* (Eph. 1:20-22). Jesus will keep His promise. His return does not depend on any nation's industrial or military might. Rather, when the appointed time has come **JESUS WILL RETURN!**

My dear friends, let us not doubt it. Let us not ignore it. Let us not get too busy and so forget about it. Rather, let us be ready for it! How can we do that? We will borrow the mottos of two branches of our American military service to explain how we can be ready for Jesus' return.

I.

First, from the motto of the United States Coast Guard we learn that we can be ready for Jesus' return when we are **semper paratus**—that is, “always prepared.” The Coast Guard motto promises that they will always be prepared, regardless of conditions, to defend our coastlines from

enemy assault or to rescue those who may be in danger off our coasts.

How do we apply that thought to the spiritual realm? Jesus, in our text, compares us to the servants of a man who is gone. He says: *“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.”* The key words are “wait” and “watching.” To be prepared, we must be spiritually alert, and we must be able to recognize our true Master. We do not want to open the door for the wrong person! These objectives can only be met when we study God’s Word. Such study is absolutely essential, for Jesus tells us: *“If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (Jn. 8:31-32).

Now that may sound easy, but our world is filled with contradictory claims, many of which are supposedly based on the Bible. Things can and do get confusing, if you are not solidly anchored in Scripture. For instance, our Master is Jesus, but who is He? The Bible tells us that Jesus is part of the Triune God along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. It tells us that Jesus is both true God, one with the Father, but also true man, born of the virgin Mary. The Bible tells us that Jesus is our Savior from sin. He kept every commandment of God for us and thereby provides us with perfect righteousness. He also bore the penalty for all our sins on the cross as our Substitute, providing forgiveness, life, and salvation as free gifts when we are led by the Spirit to believe in Him.

What do others say? They speak of a Jesus, but he is not the Jesus described in the Bible. Mormonism teaches that Jesus is not part of the Trinity, but a god separate from the Father. They claim he is one of many gods and that his death does not provide full atonement for our sins. The Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses is not God at all. They claim he was the archangel Michael before he lived on earth. They claim that while on earth he was merely a man, and that after his death only his spirit arose while his body was destroyed. They claim he will not return physically at the end of time. Christian Science says Jesus was not God, nor was he the Christ. They claim God cannot become flesh. They claim Jesus did not suffer for our sins, die on the cross, or physically arise from the dead. They, too, claim he will not come back in any literal sense. Clearly these religions embrace a different master than the Jesus of the Bible, although they all claim to follow the Bible.

What is even more disturbing, however, is the fact that today the person and work of Jesus are under attack by mainline Christian denominations, including some Lutherans. There is a movement in many Christian churches to deny the miraculous within Scripture—to claim that much of the Bible was written to bring glory to Jesus, but that which early Christians wrote about Jesus was not true. The virgin birth, the miracles, and the physical resurrection of Jesus are all denied. If these things are denied, you do not have the Jesus of the Bible. Instead of Jesus being our God and Savior, He is turned into merely a great man and an outstanding teacher of morality. But Jesus did not come to teach moral living. He came to do something far greater as John informs us: *“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ!”* (Jn. 1:17)

There is a distinction that we must understand, if we are to know who Jesus is and why Jesus came. That distinction involves the role of morality within Christianity and all other religions. Christianity involves morality, while all other religions are morality! In other words, the theme of Christianity is that we poor sinners cannot keep God’s law perfectly and are subject to its judgment. Jesus Christ, however, has saved us from sin and its consequence, death by being our Savior. We are not saved by being moral, that is by doing good works. Rather, being moral is simply the way we express our thanks to our Savior God for the free gift of salvation. All other religions create rules and regulations, by which their followers are told they will become worthy of God and so gain their own salvation. Do you not see that if we deny the miraculous and so make Jesus into merely a great man, we have reduced Christianity to the level of all moralistic, pagan religions!

## II.

Jesus will return! If we are **semper paratus**, we will always be ready! We can also be ready for Jesus’ return when we are **semper fidelis**—the motto of the United States Marine Corps.

**Semper fidelis** means “always faithful.” Marine training involves great emphasis on character, duty, and faithfulness. Such characteristics are absolutely essential to successful military operations.

The same is true with regard to our readiness as we await our Savior’s return. In our text Jesus says: *“You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect....Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”* Jesus returned to heaven and has made us, the members of His Church, stewards of His precious gospel message. We are faithfully to share it with everyone. The Bible tells us: *“It is required in stewards that one be found faithful”* (1 Cor. 4:2).

The Bible has a number of parables stressing the need for such faithfulness. In the Parable of the Minas (cf. Lk. 19), the master gives each of his ten servants one mina (a piece of money in Jesus’ day) and tells them to use it until He returns. The mina symbolizes the gospel message. The parable encourages us to use the gospel faithfully in our lives. In the Parable of the Talents (cf. Mt. 25), talents (another form of money) are distributed by the master in varying amounts to his servant. These talents symbolize the different gifts we each receive from God. We are urged to use everything that we have received from God—our time, talents, intellectual gifts, financial resources—faithfully in His service. In the parable in our text, the emphasis is placed on the tasks that the Lord has given each of us. These, too, will vary, but we are all urged to do whatever God has given us to do faithfully until He returns.

What have we been given to do? There are certain things that we all without exception have been given to do. One is to *“make disciples of all the nations”* (Mt. 28:19). We are to use the gospel and share it regularly. Are we doing that? Do we talk about our faith? Do we take the time to visit with that relative or neighbor who needs to know about Jesus? If not, may we seek God’s forgiveness, strength and guidance, so that we do so in the future.

There are certain other things that many but not all of us have been given to do. For instance, some of us have been given the responsibility of being parents. Are we *“training our children up in the way they should go”* (Prov. 22:6) and *“bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4), or are we neglecting their welfare and becoming so preoccupied with our own careers and pleasures that we have ignored our responsibilities? Many of us are husbands, while many of us are wives. Are we fulfilling our responsibilities in these areas? Are we husbands *“loving our wives (sacrificially) as Christ loved the church”* (Eph. 5:25) and *“dwelling with them in understanding and honoring them”* (1 Pet. 3:7) as God’s gifts to us? Are you wives *“submitting (yourselves) to your husbands”* (1 Pet. 3:2; Eph. 5:22-23) and respecting your husbands as the Lord would have you? (Eph. 5:33) Or, do our lives reflect the callous attitude towards marriage so prevalent in our days? Even worse, do we find ourselves verbally or physically abusing one another? In the *Small Catechism* we find what Luther called the Table of Duties, which is a handy reminder of what it means to be faithful to our Lord. I would encourage everyone here today to review that section of your catechisms. Use it to review your record of faithfulness. If you have failed in any way, and who will not admit to that, ask God for forgiveness for past sins and strength for future success.

My dear friends, amid all the distractions of this world, the temptations of Satan and the weakness of our own sinful flesh, may we always be found ready for our Lord’s return. I offer as a closing thought and encouragement the verse serving as our Word of Truth today: *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life!”* (Rev. 2:10) Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Paul D. Nolting  
To God alone be the glory!

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