

Albany Presbyterian Church
August 10th, 2025

Luke 12:32-40 “Be ready!”

Today, we continued from last week’s reading in Luke 12,
Which begins with what Jesus said in verse 31, “but seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you.

To understand Luke 12, reading from verse 32, we need to go back to the beginning, verse 22, where Jesus says to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”

And Jesus says, “Consider the ravens, they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds? Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will He clothe you? He said Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it. Your father knows that you need them.”

A while ago, I met a woman in her mid-70s who was a nurse and teacher who had a lovely family, who had battled cancer for many years. When I first met her, she had already been close to death several times, but she kept overcoming it. Over the years, I grew to truly respect her courage and faithfulness despite the many challenges she faced. One day, when I was with her in the state of agony, she asked me to read to her this passage, which she did not know where exactly, but something about birds and flowers in the field. So, I searched and found this passage and read to her these verses in Luke 12. As I was reading it, I wondered. How was this comforting to her?

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. So 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.”

I remember reading a biography about Albert Schweitzer, a French German pastor, missionary doctor, philosopher, and musician. He was a Lutheran pastor and became a lecturer in theology in Germany. He was also trained as a medical doctor later in his 30s and went to what is now known as Gabon in central Africa as a missionary. I don’t remember all the details. But what I remembered reading about him from a short biography for children was his courage and deep compassion for the sick and dying in a country where modern medicine had not yet reached. It was only later that I learned about his many achievements. I learnt about the Nobel Peace Prize he won in 1952, for his work in the hospitals in Africa, and also for the concept of ‘reverence for life’, which says the purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others. Only then have we become actual human beings. *“I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live”.*

What I think is less known is that Schweitzer wrote extensively as a theological scholar, which explains where his inspiration for this ‘reverence for life’ comes from; He says it comes from the concept of “the Kingdom of God,” which, for him, was what Jesus primarily focused on. In his book, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, Schweitzer explains that the Kingdom of God is both an ethical and eschatological concept. Eschatological, which is to do with a belief about the end of time, where Christ will return, and God’s kingdom will be established. Schweitzer says, for Jesus and at least his followers and the gospel witnesses, the coming of the Kingdom of God was imminent. Though this idea has been lost throughout history, its urgency has mostly been ignored.

And during the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a rise in literary criticism and skepticism. A scholarship focused on the quest for the historical Jesus became popular, involving many scholars wrestling with Jesus and the Kingdom of God as both historical and mystical. I think even Schweitzer himself recognized the difficulty in understanding the Kingdom of God and its imminence.

And that, as Schweitzer says, “Jesus comes to us as One unknown, without name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those who knew him not. He speaks the same word: “You follow me!” And sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands and to those who obey him, whether wise or simple, he will reveal himself through the toil, the conflicts, the suffering they go through in his fellowship. And as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn through their own experience who He is.” (in “*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*”);

This is what Hebrews 11 says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” And as 2 Peter 3:8-9 said, “For God, a thousand years is like a day, and a day is like a thousand years. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.”

And as Hebrews 11 continues to say, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who live in such faith, starting from Abraham and all his endless journeys until he found the promised city. Until he was blessed with descendants to fill that city through his wife, who could not have children until God blessed her.

And so, when Jesus says, “Be ready.” It is also a call to faith.

“Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamp burning like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks at the door, they can immediately open the door for him.” Jesus also says, “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.” Again, “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready even if he comes late, even in the early morning, like in the second or third watch of the night.” For surely, “The Son of Man will come” even at an hour when you do not expect him.”

And so, Albert Schweitzer lived as one who anticipated the Kingdom of God, which meant for him to live ethically, “in reverence for life” through acts of love and compassion. This was why he left the comfort of academia and music to study medicine and eventually move to Africa as a medical missionary. He said, “It moved me strangely to see so far from perceiving that the effort to serve the love preached by Jesus may sweep a man into a new course of life, although they read in the New Testament that it can do so and found it exactly in that order.”

And my friend, who loved this passage, had many close encounters with God during the time I knew her. I asked her once which part of these verses she found comforting. Was it the image of the bird in the air or the flowers in the field? Or was it that Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life,” “Do not worry because your father knows.” “Do not be afraid, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.” She says all of it. She says all of it, even the thief in the night.

And that she has faith in God. She knew he knew how she was afraid and worried at times, and yet he knew she trusted Jesus, who promised her the Kingdom. And so, she waited through her many challenging nights and days... trying to be ready... ready for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Ready to serve and keep her lamps burning.

So, it wasn't just the flowers and the birds in the air... it was all of it... And that Jesus says, “seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given unto you.”

Jesus says, “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, “Because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” “So, you must be ready.” Amen.