

SERMON — ST. ANDREW'S, KITCHENER — AUGUST 10, 2025

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

It is good to be back after what was a refreshing, though often incredibly hot July vacation. It is a privilege to be able to take off a substantial chunk of time, so thank you to everyone who ministered in whatever way, and contributed to our life together, in that time.

I recall one particular hot day early on in July. As some might know, we love our house, but one thing it's missing is air conditioning. That and its black roof that attracts and sucks in the sun's heat can make for sweltering summers. This one particular day, trying to get to sleep, we had the windows cranked open as far as possible. A slight temperature change, but the tradeoff is that the open windows let in more of the not insignificant traffic noise from Victoria Street. I tossed and turned, and tossed and turned. Until, sometime in the middle of the night, came voices from under one of those wide open windows. I grabbed what ended up being a fairly tiny souvenir baseball bat and skulked around the window, trying to detect any misbehaviour. It was a group of young adults — 'cool kids' — having congregated for some reason on our driveway. My mind raced: *Would they try to get in our cars? Would they steal our cherry tomatoes? Would they pee in our bushes?* In the end, they just chatted for a while, and then went away. But the moment Swanson's Home Hardware opened the next day, there I was to add to what I thought was already a full complement of motion sensor lights. I added one more, to the side of our front porch, aimed right at where that group of loiterers had gathered. And now, should anyone approach that space, they're met with a narrow beam of light for about 15 seconds. Which reduces my anxiety by about 15 per cent. *"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, for the Son*

of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." A short and somewhat unsettling parable meant to (figuratively) *wake up* Jesus's disciples (then and now) to the promise that "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," which starts off this snippet of the Gospel. Jesus is coming, bringing in a change to our world greater than we could ever ask or imagine... *but...* apparently we are called to be ready for this. Blink and you'll miss it. Or, as the other parable employed in this discourse put it, *be alert; be awake*. We might be uncomfortable with the parable's descriptions and context: *household slaves*, in this case. But the parable subtly pokes holes in the hierarchical way 1st century society was organized: when the master gets home and finds not just a motion sensor light, but rather, everyone in the house awake and confident (not just skulking around like me, in my bunny slippers), he puts on an apron and makes everyone a sunrise breakfast buffet. Telling us something about what Jesus was and is like. Something about what God is like. Something about God's dream for the world. *"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.... [but] the Son of Man [Jesus] is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

The primary meaning of the text is probably about the 'eschatological,' the 'end-time,' the 'ultimate' coming of Jesus. We talk about this in the creeds: *"He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."* But certainly Jesus comes to us, again and again, in other ways; not just with cloud, smoke, and trumpets. Jesus comes to us as a still, small voice. Comes to us in the naked seeking to be clothed, and the thirsty needing water. "Whatever you do to the least of these," he says, "you do to me." And Jesus comes to us even in church: in what we call "word" and "sacrament." It's a special kind of sight, or insight, illumined by faith, to recognize Jesus, which the Hebrews epistle spoke about: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* Will we have eyes to see — will our eyelids be open enough — to see the

action of God... to see the presence of Christ in our lives? There's a much-loved quote that I see shared on Facebook a lot of the time, from St. John Chrysostom: *"If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice."* It's a beautiful saying. And also a very hard saying. (It's easy to be a saint on social media; harder to live it out in real life.)

The 'coming of the Son of Man' that was particularly unexpected by many was the Cross. As a famous, sixth century hymn describes it, *"As royal banners are unfurled, the cross displays its mystery: the Maker of our flesh, in flesh, impaled and hanging helplessly."** Not the image most people would have of a saviour, or a god; but it's the faith that's been commended to us: Christ crucified. Who said to his disciples: "[I] came not to be served but to serve..." Illustrated in the parable we heard today: the master who fastens his belt, has his slaves sit down to eat, and serves *them*. A reciprocal relationship: their part was to stay awake and alert for his coming.

This section of Luke, these two small and curious parables, come after the Transfiguration story; this past Wednesday was the Feast of the Transfiguration in the Church calendar. After that event, where Jesus's inner circle of followers got a fleeting glimpse of Jesus's divine glory, the Gospel story takes a turn, with the words "When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Where he will indeed be 'taken up' on the Cross.) Jesus shares these parables about having the eyes of faith, and a spirit of alertness, and of always being prepared, in the context of the long and difficult, and I imagine anxiety-filled walk toward Jerusalem. Long journeys can be tough. Even leisurely summer vacations can be filled with the annoying refrain: "are we there yet?" And so there is an element here — a question and a challenge for us — about asking how we are in the midst of similar anxiety, and waiting. Whether we are up in the middle of the night trying to protect something that's precious to us... Or waiting to get to a new

stage, or a destination. Waiting for God, as Jesus claimed, to "give [us] the kingdom." For the Son of Man to come again, in power, to wipe away our tears. That's that 'eschatological,' or 'ultimate' sort of waiting. But we wait in other ways, too, that seem almost as important to us, at least in our anxiety: waiting for a call... waiting for an appointment... waiting for someone to be healed (or to take their last breath)... waiting for things to get better... waiting for the goodies to win, and the baddies to get their comeuppance. Or to give a very close-to-home sort of example for us here, waiting for the search committee to do its important work around identifying a new priest for St. Andrew's... Waiting for all the particular stages of that process to roll out... Waiting for the next chapter to begin... And with that will come some of the anxiety (or whatever else) that is encountered in our waiting. There are examples of 'waiting' in the Bible. When the wandering Hebrew people were waiting for Moses to return from the mountaintop upon which he met God, their anxiety led them to melt down their gold and create an idol — a comforting but false god — the golden calf. Or we might recall how, after the Last Supper between Jesus and his followers, Jesus took a few trusted souls with him, as he went off to pray in the garden. What do the disciples do? *They fall asleep...* For some, anxiety may lead to a sort of over-acting; keeping busy. For others, the anxiety becomes crippling, even exhausting, as the disciples found in Gethsemane. We are particularly vulnerable in times of anxious waiting.

I recall a particular experience of waiting; I've probably mentioned it before, and you probably experienced something like it yourself: In the very early days of the pandemic; actually before it was officially a pandemic, and before the rules, and laws, and changed social mores, there was a surreal moment, where we knew that *something* was going to happen, though we didn't know what. One day Leslie mentioned that on the way home from work at the church, I should swing by the grocery store and pick up some basics: canned vegetables, rice, things like that. Or,

if you recall, this was the beginning of the great disappearance of toilet paper from store shelves. So I pulled into the Superstore on Fischer-Hallman, as I had dozens of times previously. But this time, I found not a single cart available to take. And then as I walked further in, I found a line (of people lucky enough to have carts), circling the entire perimeter of the store; all having had the same idea as me: stock up on essentials, just in case. I took one look at the length of the line, and I guess decided that it was preferable to go without eating for a while, than to wait in a line that long. So I walked out, and of course history unfolded as it did. Though on a personal level, I eventually realized that I avoided setting foot in that particular store for probably two or three years, because the apocalyptic image of that massive lineup of panic-stricken shoppers had induced significant anxiety in me. (Though I was totally fine shopping literally anywhere else.)

So maybe that is a parable, of a sort, for us. Do we actually recognize that it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom: everything we need for the just and loving flourishing of all that God created and called "good?" Do we actually remember to stay awake and alert for the coming of the master, who comes at odd times, but does so with a heart to serve and love those who open the door to him? And do we actually have the wisdom to recognize that in these times of waiting and uncertainty, there are some who will, consciously or not, bring chaos, or act from a place of greed or selfishness? Or self-protection that may be understandable, but will result in store shelves being stripped bare.

How are we, in this situation, Jesus asks his followers — including us — as he travels the long and hard walk to Jerusalem and to the Cross. We are all, in one way or another, on that path, and there will be encounters with forks in the road. There will be the boredom and anxiety of waiting, or the repeated refrain of "are we there yet?" There will be thieves and bandits on the dangerous stretches. But in all of this God is with us: in Jesus. But how do we make him our co-pilot? We do it

by operating from a starting point of faith, not fear. By having our eyes open for the subtle movement of the Spirit. By remembering that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and trusting that even though we can't see the end of the road, we know that Jesus has gone there ahead of us. And he will come back and guide us to where he is. There's a beautiful and famous prayer by Thomas Merton, the famous monk, author, and activist of the 20th century:

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think I am following your will

does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you

does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,

though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though

I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,

and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.

* "As Royal Banners are Unfurled," Venatius Fortunatus (540?-600?)