

9th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 14, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on August 10, 2025

Genesis 15:1-6 / Psalm 33:12-22 / Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 / Luke 12:32-40

*Let us be wise and ponder these things,
and consider well the mercies of the Lord. Amen.*

Throughout Luke ch12, Jesus lays out His demand for being all-in as well as presenting a sense of urgency. It's all very challenging, and today's call is one of "*now and not yet*".

*Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.
You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected
hour.*

"*Now and not yet*" is difficult to get your head around, but it's more present in our lives than we think. One concrete example I can think of is medical residents: they are qualified doctors, but they aren't allowed to practice without the tutelage of a more experienced doctor. That is the same for Curates in the Church of England: they are ordained priests and have all of the functions of a priest, but they must serve under a more experienced priest for a time.

Another experience is immigration. It is very much a "*now and not yet*" situation. Speaking of my own experience, I got my UK student visa at the airport when I arrived at Heathrow. I showed my letter of acceptance to Westcott House and my bank statement. The Home Office stamped my passport with the visa, and I was on my way. That was September 15, 2001, but should have been September 11 ... something delayed me. So, by the time it was clear that I would be ordained in the Church of England and stay for awhile, the visa rules changed.

Near the end of my 3rd year in seminary, I was advised by the Home Office to fill out a particular form, and it was rejected. I needed to apply for my Minister of

Religion Visa at a UK consulate in my home country. OK. I'm flying home to ship all my belongings anyway, so I'll do it then. The consulate is in LA, and all my belongings are in San Francisco, so, that will be a 1,00mi roundtrip ... only to discover that my current student visa had been canceled when that incorrect form I submitted was rejected. Now it became a scenario of applying for another student visa so I could return to Cambridge and take my finals. Despite the fact that I was doing all this now, it became a *"not yet"*.

I eventually received my Minister of Religion visa. My Bishop knew my Member of Parliament who, ultimately, put some pressure on the Home Office to get it approved and processed. Every 3yrs, I had to go through the process of renewal, which meant I had to send my passport to the Home Office for the process which took up to 3mos. And without a passport, I couldn't leave the island. At any point, I could be rejected and deported. Yet, I was expected to go on with my daily life as usual. I had to do that 4x. And the rules were different each time because of the evolving immigration rules. It was daunting and stressful and all very *"now and not yet."* And when I was not in active ministry for 4mos between the parish and the University, it was very clearly stated on my visa that was in my passport that I had no recourse to public funds, even though I had paid into them, and I could not work in any other employment than the Church.

For a Cambridge-educated middle-class person from a "safe" country, albeit brown and not white, there was a lot of worry and handwringing. The *"now and not yet"* carrying on as usual while waiting for what was to come was not a comfortable position to be in.

Most of you have not navigated the immigration system of this or another country. But there are some other *"now and not yet"* situations that you may have experienced. The escrow process of buying a house is very *"now and not yet"*. You believe yourself to have bought a house, you tell everyone and you start packing and making plans. But anything can happen in the 30-45-day period of *"now and not yet"*, and everything can be taken away from you.

In the lead-up to this “*now and not yet*” situation Jesus puts us into, Jesus prepares us for it, but we don’t know that this is what he is preparing us for. Last week, Jesus was warning against greed, and He told the rich man:

One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

In the next moment, Jesus tells the Disciples:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Which leads into today’s Gospel lesson which closes out Jesus’ reassuring the Disciples that they not worry and to not be afraid. Shed everything that is not necessary, proclaim the Kingdom, and eventually the Kingdom will be given to you: “*Now and not yet.*” The Disciples are now like tenure-track professors. You have all of the responsibilities of your colleagues, yet none of the security. If you jump through all of these hoops, then *maybe, just maybe* you will be a full professor.

Yet we go through those hoops of “*now and not yet.*” Why? Because the fulfillment of the “*now and not yet*” is worth more than anyone can imagine. Those who are not going through that process, those who are not part of whatever you are struggling through, they do not know the immense joy and privilege that comes with the fulfillment of your experience of “*now and not yet*”. The “*now and not yet*” that Jesus is asking of the Disciples and of us comes with a much greater reward. We are to proclaim the Kingdom as we wait for the Kingdom. So, we live in this liminal space and time in which we must move ourselves closer to God, closer to Jesus, closer to the Kingdom of God that is near. The question is: *What does that mean? What does that look like?*

We have explored this from different angles over the years, but it is worth constantly reviewing as we reflect on our call to proclaim the Kingdom as we wait for the Kingdom. Ten years ago, when the parish was reflecting on who St Stephen's was and where it wanted to go as they called a new Rector, the Mission Statement was born.

Who here has read the St Stephen's Mission Statement? It is on the back cover of the service booklets, so you may have read it while waiting for the service to begin, in a quiet moment when you were orienting yourself to a new seasonal service booklet or when the sermon was particularly boring.

You will no doubt have seen or heard the tagline that comes from our Mission Statement: *Welcoming – Worshiping – Working*. The full text is:

- *Welcoming: We invite all to join us at every stage in their spiritual journeys.*
- *Worshiping: We cultivate a living tradition of liturgy and a life made holy by the sacraments.*
- *Working: We share our abundance, we strive for justice, and we accept our calling to protect God's creation.*

A good way to get a snapshot of how and if we are living our Mission Statement is to look at the action verbs:

- *We invite – We cultivate – We share – We strive – We accept*

Are we *inviting, cultivating, sharing, striving and accepting* with intention and effectively? Over the week or the rest of August, I *invite* you to reflect on ways in which you yourself and St Stephen's as a whole *cultivate* the elements of our Mission Statement. Then I encourage you to *share* those thoughts with me and with others so we can *strive* to live out our Baptismal Covenant in this place and *accept* where and when we surely have failed to do so. Please don't take the

green service booklet home ... but do take the words of the Mission Statement into your head and heart so you can do this reflection.

Throughout July and August, the Vestry has been reviewing a ministry developed by The Episcopal Church called *Invite – Welcome – Connect*. It is helping us take a good look at who we are as a parish and how we engage in proclaiming the Kingdom in a systematic way rather than the haphazard way that we are used to. It's helping us learn how to live our own Mission Statement of *Welcoming – Worshiping – Working*. Some key buzz phrases that have jumped out for me have been:

- *The deep truth of Invite is courage. It takes courage to invite someone to church ... We need to invite, and then leave the rest up to God and Holy Spirit.*
- *The deep truth of Welcome is seeing the other – offering a relationship rather than simply membership.*
- *The deep truth of Connect is the sacred act of listening ... Just as love of God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them.*

The repeated theme throughout the ministry is “*listening*”, and the former Presiding Bishop Michael Curry made me realize that proclaiming the Kingdom of God is not about *me* ... it's about *God* and pointing others toward God. He said:

Evangelism is not what other people say that it is. Evangelism is sharing the faith that is in you and listening and learning from the faith that's in somebody else. It's not just about you talking – it's about listening and sharing; it's about a relationship where God can get in the midst.

In our Welcoming – Worshiping – Working, we need to be listening to those within our community and invite them into this liminal time, into the life-giving

love of God through Jesus. By listening, we would be living the *“now and not yet”* among, for and with the Good People of San Luis Obispo, proclaiming the Kingdom of God among, for and with them as we await the Kingdom of God.

Like Jesus tells the Disciples, we must be ready for His return at any moment. We must also wait in a way that must not diminish our expectancy nor impede our preparedness. In the *“now”* we proclaim the Kingdom; in the *“not yet”* we receive the Kingdom.

We are called to live in this liminal space and time in which we must move ourselves closer to God, closer to Jesus, closer to the Kingdom of God that is near. It's a matter of *“now and not yet”*. The joys and challenges that come with this *“now and not yet”* require one thing: faith – *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*.