

BE WATCHFUL
Rev. Jason Santalucia

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Text: Luke 12:32-40

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. “But know this: 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 unexpected hour.”

The gospel reading this morning picks up right after Jesus’ famous words: “Consider the lilies of the field.” Right after saying that, he tells two short parables—one about servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, and another about a homeowner keeping watch for a thief in the night. Both parables turn on the same idea: be ready; be watchful.

But what does that actually mean? What does it look like to “be watchful” as a follower of Jesus?

When I was in seminary, someone hung a sign in the library that said, “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” It was funny, but it also hit a little bit close to home. A lot of us live with a kind of low-grade anxiety about how we’re living our faith. We know we’re supposed to be doing something, but we’re not always sure what, and that uncertainty can make us feel very unsettled. Am I doing enough? Am I living the way I’m supposed to? Am I really being faithful?

Taken by itself, out of context, this reading feeds into that anxiety. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit...” Jesus says, “you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” It’s super urgent, and super vague, which is super unhelpful. There’s no checklist of things we’re supposed to be doing, no instructions, just this blinking red light: “Be ready, be watchful.” But again, what does that mean? What does it look like in real life? Well, the way to find out, I think, is to go back through the gospel because Luke has actually been dropping little bread crumbs along the way, and if we go back, we can pick up the trail.

The first bread crumb is at the beginning of this chapter—chapter 12—where Jesus warns the disciples about “the yeast of the Pharisees.” What does he mean by that? He’s talking about hypocrisy—putting on a big show of being devout and pious, and then turning around and acting very differently in

private. So, part of being watchful is being genuine. Not just looking like a good person, but actually being a good person, even when no one's checking up on you.

The next bread crumb is in the previous chapter—chapter 11—where Jesus teaches the disciples the Lord's Prayer and tells them to pray constantly, persistently, and expectantly. So, another part of being watchful is trusting in God's care and provision and not giving up on God if we don't get what we need right away, but continuing to lean into that relationship.

The next bread crumb is all the way back in chapter 10, where we run into the Good Samaritan, who notices someone in need and stops to help them, even though it's inconvenient and costly, and he could just as easily pass right on by. So, this is part of being watchful, too: seeing the needs around us and not doing what most people do, which is ignore them.

Putting all that together, then, watchfulness is about having a faith that's not just for show; a faith you practice every day; a faith that's part of who you are; a faith that brings you closer to God; and a faith that connects you with other people.

Let me give you an example. A woman in a church I used to serve—a retired school teacher named Helen—used to carry around a little notebook. She called it her “prayer book.” Whenever she heard someone mention a struggle or a need—even in passing—she'd jot it down. A friend's surgery. A neighbor's job search. A student having a hard time in school. Then, every morning, she'd pray for every one of those people. And she didn't stop there. She'd send cards. She'd bake muffins. She'd show up on their doorstep with a casserole. She wasn't flashy. She wasn't trying to impress anyone. But she was watchful. She was attuned to the needs of others and ready to respond with love.

That's the kind of thing Jesus is talking about. Faith with eyes wide open. A heart that notices. A life that's ready.

Now, there's one more bread crumb, and it's the one I already mentioned, the one that comes right before this reading—the “consider the lilies of the field” passage, where Jesus goes on to tell people they need to sell their possessions and give the money to the poor. I saved this one for last because I think it's the one we struggle with the most. For a lot of us, it's a bridge too far. We're okay with all the other aspects of watchfulness, but we really like our stuff, and we don't want to give it up.

And that's exactly Jesus' point. It's not our possessions themselves that are the issue. Possessions are just things. They're neither good or bad. The issue is our attachment to our possessions and what it does to our priorities. Remember the reading last week? The parable of the rich fool? The man who built bigger barns to store all his grain? Jesus called him a fool, not because he was wealthy but because he made his whole life about his wealth, which did him absolutely no good when his life suddenly came to an end.

So, this final part of what it means to be watchful is keeping our priorities straight. Staying focused on what gives our lives real meaning, and what brings us real joy and fulfillment. And that's living for something other than ourselves.

Let me give you another example. I once knew a woman named Mary, who also happened to be a retired school teacher, and she told me one time about a turning point in her life. She had just retired from teaching and was looking forward to long, quiet days at home. Her calendar was empty for the first time in decades, and she planned to keep it that way. Then, one Sunday, her church mentioned a local tutoring program for kids who'd fallen behind in school. Her immediate response was, “No thanks. I've done my time in the classroom. I'm not going back.” But she

couldn't shake the idea. It kept nagging at her.

So, a week later, she walked into that tutoring center "just to see" what it was like. And by the end of that first afternoon, she'd already promised to come back. And she did—several times a week for years after that. And what surprised her the most was how her life began to feel fuller. She told me she had thought she was giving up her free time, but really, she was gaining a new purpose.

That's watchfulness, too—staying alert for those moments when God nudges you to use what you have, not for yourself, but for others.

So, here's what I think all this comes down to. This reading starts out with Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Not sell us the kingdom. Not loan it to us with interest. But give it to us—as in no strings attached, no fine print, no hidden conditions. A gift, pure and simple. So this whole way of life Jesus invites us into—it's not rooted in fear or guilt or anxiety. It's rooted in grace. God delights to give us what we need. God longs for us to live freely and generously. And that changes everything about how we watch and wait.

Watchfulness is not about being frantic or hyper-vigilant. It's about being available. It's about having your eyes open, your hands open, your heart open—to God and to the world around you. And yes, that takes a lot of trust, which doesn't come easy. I struggle with it, too, even after all the times I've experienced God's faithfulness: the right person coming into my life at just the right time; a dead-end turning out to be a whole new beginning; a fresh call when I was struggling to find my way.

I didn't plan those things, and I certainly didn't earn them. But they came to me nonetheless.

So, here's what I want to leave you with this morning: Live as if God might show up at any moment. Because God does show up all

the time. But don't be anxious. Don't be frantic. Be watchful. Be ready. Ready in your prayers. Ready in your compassion. Ready in your trust. Open-hearted. Open-handed. And full of joy. Amen.