

TEXT: Luke 12:32-40

THEME: BE READY FOR THE FUTURE!

1. No Reason to Fear the Future
2. But You Must Be Ready

Dear Christian Friends:

Worry is the #1 mental disorder in America. The Mayo Clinic claims 80-85% of its total caseload is due directly to worry and anxiety. Many experts say that coping with stress is the #1 health priority of our day. One leading physician has stated that, in his opinion, 70% of all medical patients could cure themselves if only they got rid of their worries and fears. We know that medical science has closely tied worry to heart trouble, blood pressure problems, ulcers, thyroid malfunction, migraine headaches, and a host of stomach disorders. For example, 25 million Americans have high blood pressure due to stress and anxiety; 1 million more develop high blood pressure each year. Eight million people deal with stomach ulcers each week and 112 million people take medication for stress related symptoms. That's a lot of worry and fear, stress and anxiety!

In our Gospel lesson last week, we heard Jesus addressing a huge crowd of thousands of people when he gave his strong warning against greed. Today we hear Jesus teaching his disciples not to worry. That's important for us to take note of. Even as believers, as disciples of Jesus, we are not immune to worry. In fact, it is even possible for us to worry about being a worrier. We know that we shouldn't worry, but we just can't seem to keep from worrying. And what do we usually worry about? The future!

Worry and the future seem to go together. Nearly all of our worries revolve around future matters that may or may not come to pass. Worry breeds hopelessness, and hopelessness leads to paralysis.

We may be tempted to give up on the future, to **"eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19)** in some grim way until the end comes. That's certainly no way to live, and Jesus knew it. More than that, he understands our weakness. He does not ridicule us for our worries and fears but treats us gently, calling us his **"little flock."** The promise of Jesus assures us that we have no reason to worry about or fear the future. For his is a kingdom of grace, and God deals with us in grace. **"Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."**

Why should God delight so in us, his little flock? Because we belong to him. The world may think we must earn his favor. But God gives and gives some more. He generously gives us the best when he grants us membership in his kingdom. He does that all through his Son, Jesus Christ.

A helpful exercise for us, as we face the future with all its uncertainties, is to make a mental list of the times in the past when God stood by us. Like Samuel of old, who set up a memorial stone reminding the Israelites of God's help in the past as they trembled before an imminent threat, we are reassured for the future by God's help in the past. Samuel

called the stone *Ebenezer*, literally, “stone of help.” Samuel explained, “**Thus far has the Lord helped us**” (1 Samuel 7:12). Surely he will still lead us on!

We can rest in the knowledge that nothing that happens to us needs to throw us into a panic. We have two choices. Either we view every trial and trouble as a personal outrage and travesty, crying out “Why me, Lord, why me?” Or we see it as an opportunity for us to grow and learn, to give glory to God and to serve others.

We dare not allow worry and fear to rob us of hope. The earth is the Lord’s. Our heavenly Father has put us here for his glory and for our good. He knows what is best. “**Have no fear, little flock.**”

Jesus does not want us to worry and be fearful about the future, but at the same time, he wants us to always be ready. Jesus chose to give his disciples and us an illustration of the hour of his return that has an alarming tone. “**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.**”

Jesus is like the thief in the sense that he will break into our world without warning. Or one day, before his return, he may unexpectedly call us out of this life. That thought seldom crosses our minds, does it? Few of us woke up this morning thinking this could be our last day on earth. We are more likely to think: “It can’t be my last day on earth; I’ve got too much to do this week!”

So what does Jesus mean when he says, “**You also must be ready**”? Is he trying to fill us with dread? Is he aiming to take the joy out of life? Must we sit anxiously at our windows, peering at the horizon for some sign of his return in glory? Of course not!

What Jesus wants us to know is that waiting for his appearing is an important feature of daily living as a Christian. He wants us to get out and do his will in the world while we wait, enjoying the blessings he has given. We wait for the coming of the kingdom that is already ours. We await the glory that is yet to be. What a great day that will be when we receive the goal of our lives, when our life of pain and toil is over and we are ushered into the fullness of Christ’s kingdom!

Remember too, what makes us faithful and ready is not what we do but what Jesus makes of us. Often life appears to be more than we can handle. Frustration sets in and we feel depleted, burned out. When that happens, we need to be alerted. As someone has said, “Life can be awfully simple or simply awful.” It all depends on whether each day is committed to the Lord or whether we are still laboring on our own.

Preparation for the future cannot take place in the future. It must take place now. Our hope must be nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. All that Jesus has done for us—living a perfect life in our place and dying as our Substitute—simply does away with worry and fear. So my friends, be dressed in God’s Word and Sacraments, ready for service, doing our Lord’s will until Jesus, your only Savior from sin, death, and hell, comes for you. Amen.

Prayer of the church

Dear Father, in your tender love, you have given great and precious promises to us, your children. Preserve us from the anxieties, doubts, fears, and worries that assail us, and increase our faith. When life stresses us out, when life puzzles or disturbs us, teach us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Cover us with his blood and righteousness so that we can stand firm in the assurance of his promise to uphold and deliver us.

Hear us, dear Father, as we pray for a family member, an acquaintance, a neighbor, or a friend who does not believe in you, or whose faith is weak or troubled from worry and fear.

Silent prayer

Wherever your Word is proclaimed, dear Father, grant it success. Let your kingdom come to us and others, so that we and many more might join the assembly of saints and angels to sing your praise forever.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.