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# Are We Ready?

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 30 November 2025**

Isaiah 2:1-5 • Matthew 24:36-44

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

God makes all things new. And all good things happen in God's own time. That is the message of our Gospel reading today. But what time that is — we do not know. Jesus speaks in Matthew's Gospel today about the coming of God's kingdom: "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt 24:36). People for centuries have tried to predict when Jesus will return, and many have named specific dates, but they always pass, and nothing happens. I used to listen to a Christian radio station back in California. The lead announcer was convinced that he had figured out the formula to discover the date of Jesus' return, and he used to preach about it on a daily basis. For months leading up to the day, he would tell his listeners with great confidence and in serious tones that our Saviour was coming on this date. He had a deep, sonorous voice, and would tell us that "Jesus will return on May 27th, two thousand and eight. Will you be ready?" Well, the day came, and — nothing happened. I thought he might learn his

lesson then, that it is not for us to know; but a few weeks later, he had come up with a new date, and the whole cycle began again.

But he was right about one thing: we should be prepared. Jesus tells us that we should always be ready for his coming. Being ready means leading a life of faith and charity, following Jesus and serving him and our fellow humans. If we do this, then it doesn't matter when the final day comes, for our Lord will find us ready.

Paul puts it in terms of day and night. He asks us to “lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light” (Romans 13:12). What you do in the darkness, no one sees; but the light of day reveals what you do and how you act. If we follow Christ, serving God and serving others in his name, then we need never be ashamed of what we do, or afraid of being judged. We will be ready when Jesus comes again, whenever that is. It's not something to worry about, for it will happen in God's good time; and because it is God's action, it will be for the best.

I have been looking back at the year we've spent together. God has been very busy here in this parish! We engaged Marco as youth minister; we engaged Andrew as associate priest; we started a new service at Prebbleton; we've just started an after-school programme. We had a very successful day of giving — thanks to the generosity of all you. We had a very successful parish fair — thanks to the time and talents of all of you. We continued to serve not only our congregations, but many people in the retirement homes we visit, as well as the various groups who use our hall. We are growing the parish, slowly but steadily. In sum, we have much to be thankful for, for God is acting. God is making things new.

If Jesus returned tomorrow, would he find us prepared? Three years ago, on my first Sunday in this parish (and it was the First Sunday of Advent), I said:

So our mission, as always, is two-fold: to nurture and grow the faith of those already in our parish, and to encourage those in our communities who may not know the Good News to join us. In the Corinthians reading I chose for my induction service, Paul speaks of a garden:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor 3:6-9)

I don't think we can hear that passage enough. We do the work of planting, but God gives the growth. Surely this is what Jesus will look for when he returns: how is his garden growing? Are the gardeners working in good faith to tend the crops already planted? Are they making plans to plant new crops? And is it all

done to the glory of God? For Jesus will come back in the middle of everything. I doubt he'll return at 10:30 am on a Sunday morning, ready to join the service, and share a cup of tea afterwards. No, he'll come on a Tuesday or a Wednesday in the middle of the work week, looking to see how we carry our Sunday convictions into our regular daily lives. What is it that makes us as Christians different from non-Christians? Remembering always that Jesus loves all people, surely he expects more from us, who have committed our lives to him. Jesus is speaking seriously. We receive many blessings from him, but much is expected of us as well. He describes a scene which is a bit frightening: two people working together, and when he returns, he will save one but not the other. This is however not a vision of how it must be, but a vision of how it might be. God wants all his people to be saved, and holds out the promise of salvation to each and every one of us. But we must take up that promise and live in faith, as God wants us to do. If we all follow the call of Jesus, then we will all be saved. As Isaiah says, we must walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah's vision is one of eternal peace, the picture of the salvation we all pray for:

[T]hey shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:4)

This is the world as it will be when Jesus returns and takes his chosen ones home. If we play the part Jesus wants us to play, then we are helping to bring about the kingdom of God. We are doing our part to realise that beautiful vision of peace on earth. Every one of God's people is sacred and worthy to be part of the kingdom. This is a blessed cause that we are engaged in. Let us not forget that. We are serving God through serving God's people in this place. May God give us strength and opportunity to act for the benefit of the kingdom. Amen.