

"Ready or Not"

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

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

One, two, three.. nine, ten. Ready or not, here I come! Perhaps some of you remember doing something like that. I certainly as a child remember that when we played 'Hide & Seek' we would have that time of counting and then we would jump up and say, "Ready or not, here we come!" Well, that time of counting was always a time of preparation. We are supposed to go and find our place to hide, our place to be.

Thinking back over the last few weeks, in some ways, each week has been about our preparation. When I got back on the 17th of July we talked about the nature of the world around us and our struggle with it. And, what do we do? I invited you to listen to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly, and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke, and to think about them over the course of the week. That is a way of doing preparation. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. He reminds us that we have that relationship and gives us that example of how to pray together. As we come to that prayer, we are reminded that it is a preparation, a way of entering into our relationship with God and lifting the events and relationships in our lives to God and listening to God in the midst of our lives. Prayer is important.

Last week we talked about some of the things that get in the way. Particularly if we boil down the list we went through last week, it tends to be about self-centeredness, selfishness. We need to grab hold for ourselves and not care about others. Jesus invites us to recognize when we are doing that, what we treasure, what we hold onto tightly matters. You see, we'll always hold onto something tightly. There will always be something that assures our hope, that we have the conviction in the things that are unseen. Every moment that we walk into the future we are really dealing with that—the things that assure our hope and the confidence we have in things unseen. What is it we have faith in is the question. What assures our hope? Is it simply that tomorrow will be like today? Is that our hope? What happens when that is not the case?

What assures our hope? That I have a capacity for being able to figure things out? Or that I've been able to manipulate my life in such a way that I feel pretty secure? What assures my hope? We certainly have confidence in things unseen. Today, we have all kinds of things that we are confident in that we don't see although we don't understand them fully. Things like the nature of the atom or even electricity. Certainly magnetism is one of those things that we can see does things at a distance but we can't see the magnetism. We have confidence in things unseen, probably because we see results. But the thing itself is unseen.

What are the things in our lives? I think we begin to shape a worldview which is basically our assurance of things hoped for, our confidence in things unseen. Our worldview is that which gives us that kind of view. The question that comes out of that for me is what is the basis of that confidence. Is the basis of it my own stuff? My own abilities? My own thoughts? My own way of thinking? My own construction? Society's

construction? Cultural construction? There is something that is unseen that we have confidence in a lot of times. At least, I can't look out there and see culture, though there is evidence of it.

What is the basis of our faith? Certainly Hebrews is pointing us to recognize that it is when the basis of our faith is the assurance of things hoped for provided by the creator of the universe, the God who comes in grace in Jesus Christ. The one who enters our lives in the Holy Spirit, prompting us in ways we may not expect. Who is our assurance of things hoped for? Recognizing God is the reason for our assurance and deserves our confidence is what forms our ability to do that preparation. It's the reason we listen to Jesus. Do we have this conviction in things not seen, the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of God in our lives? That God is the creator and sustainer of all that is? Where do we put our hope? Assurance? Conviction? Because that assurance and conviction shape our lives.

What's so important about having those things figured out? Having them as part of our lives? Shaping our lives? Well, because life happens. I think back to when I was an eighteen year-old, there was a huge change in my life. I was ending high school and leaving home. I was stepping into something completely new in going off to college. Now that was an exciting change but ready or not it came. It happened. There was a time in college when I was a campus minister in the National Parks and I worked in between Yellowstone and Grand Tetons. I remember when I was traveling there, I came up over a hill and the Tetons were off in the distance. There was a great excitement that all of a sudden I was there. But, ready or not here I am. Along with it came work and being a minister for the first time in my life. Ready or not.

Think about all the things in our lives that come, ready or not. You know, end of college and then I got married and I'm not sure I was ready, but ready or not, I was married. I had children and I knew I wasn't ready, but ready or not they came. Some of those events were great things. And then the shooting in our church. Ready or not, a terrible thing happened. It is the assurance of our hope, the conviction in things not seen, our faith in God, our trust in God that shapes us and guides us, enables us to get through tragedy. Then, to look to what's next, to see what needs to happen. Indeed, our assurance and confidence allows us to listen to things like Isaiah where it says, "Cease doing evil, do good, seek justice and care for those who are weak and struggle." Because ready or not, life happens. And it is as we put our assurance of things hoped for in the one who can make hope come true, who gives us real promise.

As we put our confidence in things unseen, in the one who has created the gift we have, the grace we know, the wonder of tomorrow. Ready or not, tomorrow comes but when we have faith, confidence, assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen that is based in God, the grace of Christ and the wonder of the Holy Spirit, we are more ready than not. Amen.