

TRUMPET Ready Living

Sermon, November 8, 2020

Texts: Psalm 78:1-7; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

The last time we looked at these passages in the lectionary cycle I shared these words of “wisdom” from the sixties: *“When I think of all the worries people seem to find, and how they’re in a hurry to complicate their minds by chasing after money and dreams that can’t come true ... I’m glad that we are different; we’ve better things to do. Many others plan their future; I’m busy loving you. One, two, three, four Sha la la la la live for today and don’t worry ‘bout tomorrow, hey ey-ey ... from a band called the Grass Roots, in their 1967 top hit “Live for Today”.*

That was a hugely popular song, with a message that initially sounds good, almost biblical, but it’s a message that can also be seductively dangerous and, frankly, silly. Don’t be an idiot! How we live today profoundly affects our tomorrows for good or for ill. What happens in our “todays” doesn’t just stay in our “todays”; contrary to that old ad campaign, what happens in Vegas *doesn’t* stay in Vegas. It stays with you for the rest of your life! Let’s acknowledge the sober reality that both the *amount* and the *quality* of our tomorrows are both profoundly affected by how we live today.

You may remember the old story of a weather forecast published in an Iowa newspaper that inadvertently left out one very important word. The word was “rain.” The report read, *“There is a 90% chance of tomorrow.”* Now, I think all of us here hope the chances are better than that! But who knows? It is good to prepare for tomorrow, and it is also good to be prepared just in case there *is* no tomorrow. Yes, *“There is a 90% chance of tomorrow.”* It is good to be prepared for whatever tomorrow might, or might not, bring. And the way we best do that is by living our *today*s responsibly and well! Don’t live just for today, sha la la la hey hey. **Don’t** live like there’s no tomorrow!

If we’ve learned nothing else in this wacky year of 2020, life is full of the unexpected (*a few favorite quips about this tumultuous year: “The dumbest thing I ever purchased was a 2020 Planner.” “If I had known in March that it was the last time I would be in a restaurant, I would have ordered dessert”*) We need to prepare for whatever may come our way, *and* we need to do all we can to help the generations after us prepare for whatever may come their way, as well. The question that weaves throughout our Bible readings is this: Are we prepared? Are we ready? Who knows what tomorrow may bring? *“Therefore keep watch,”* Jesus said in today’s Gospel, *“because you do not know the day or the hour.”* Who knows what door of opportunity might open, and you might find yourself unable to walk through until it’s too late? Is there some unfinished business in your life that can and needs to be taken care of? Who knows if we might even have tomorrow? Be prepared; we need to live in such a way that if there is just a 90% chance of tomorrow, and if we were to be part of that unfortunate 10%, we would have nothing to apologize for, we would have no regrets! Are we prepared? Are we ready? And are our children being prepared? Are we doing all we can to prepare them for whatever might come their way in all their tomorrows? **ARE WE LIVING LIKE THERE IS A TOMORROW?**

We need to prepare for whatever may come our way, *and* we best do that by living well today. We are to use our time and our resources and our energy and our efforts TODAY to seize the opportunities we may have with an eye to how that will affect our tomorrow. That pertains to our finances, our time, our talents, our places in life, and so on. So, sha-la-la-la live for today AND tomorrow, and pray that God will give us the wisdom to best strike that balance in the day we have, of living fully in the day we have while responsibly anticipating our tomorrows. And we need to do all we can to help the generations after us prepare for whatever may come their way, as well.

Also referred to the last time we looked at these passages in the lectionary cycle was an excerpt from Gary Richmond’s book, **A View from the Zoo**, which tells of how one member of the animal kingdom, the giraffe, prepares its young for tomorrow. As you know, giraffes have very long legs. The body of a mama giraffe is some ten feet from the ground ... and she does not lower her body when she gives birth. When a calf is born, the calf immediately drops ten feet to the ground and usually lands on its back with a whumph! What a way to come into the world ... ten feet is a long way to fall! Then after falling on its back, the newborn calf usually rolls over on its stomach with his legs tucked under him. At this point the mother giraffe does something extraordinary. She waits about a minute and then kicks the newborn calf and sends it sprawling head over heels! And she kicks it again, and again, and again until the baby giraffe figures out how to get up and stand up to Mom. The little giraffe standing for the first time on its very wobbly legs is now ready ... ready to follow Mom and the rest of the herd; ready to walk in safety for all its tomorrows. Usually, in the wild a baby giraffe is ready to go with the herd in just ten hours after he/she is born! Now; I’m not advocating this for human parents, but Mama Giraffe was not being abusive. Quite the contrary! She knows lions and hyenas and leopards would love to make a meal of a baby giraffe. So, she needs her baby to get to its feet as soon as possible so it can keep up with the herd. Kicking is her way of preparing her young one, protecting him from predators. Kicking is her loving way of preparing her young one to walk in a way that provides for more and better tomorrows.

I think the Psalmist suggests a much better technique than Mama Giraffe in preparing our children for their tomorrows, a much better way of protecting our children from the literal and figurative predators out there! From our Psalter today, *"Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us ... we will not hide them from their children. We will tell the next generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders which He has wrought. He established a testimony in Jacob, and established a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and they in turn would tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but would keep His commandments."*

He is emphatic ... we have a sacred generational trust to not hide the things of God from our children, or (*as other translations have it*) to not obscure these things for them. We must do all we can to make the things of God clear to them, so they can stand up and stand firm in their convictions and go on to have more and better tomorrows. That's why we want children growing up in the church, being part of the church community, knowing our faith traditions, so they and we can have a brighter and better tomorrow. After all, there is wisdom in the saying that you are only as happy as your least happy child. The Psalmist knows there is a better than 90% chance of tomorrow, and that we and our children will be so much better off in all our tomorrows if we would all trust in God, not forget His deeds, and keep His commands ... as we live for today AND for tomorrow. Again, the question weaving throughout our Bible readings is this: Are we prepared? Are we ready? Are we living today well, in anticipation of our tomorrows?

The following was edited out due to time; I include it here: In our Gospel reading, Jesus describes what should be a happy event, a wedding celebration. In that culture the customary role of these bridesmaids was to use their lamps to light the way, to light the processional, from the bride's father's house as the new couple made their way to their new home. There at the new couple's home the joyous wedding banquet takes place after the bridal party arrives. All ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to await the bridegroom. But only five of the bridesmaids were sensible enough to prepare in case of delay; they brought enough oil to refill their lamps just in case. Sure enough, the bridegroom was delayed ... at midnight, they are all awakened by a shout. The Bridegroom is on his way, and the other five wound up having to run down to the 24-hour oil station to buy some more oil. Before they got back, though, the bridegroom had come, the five sensible bridesmaids were ready and waiting with their lamps lit, and on they processed to the festive wedding banquet, and the door was shut after they entered. The procession was over; the party began. When the "foolish five" return from their emergency oil-buying excursion, they have missed the whole reason they needed their lamps lit: the processional! That was their one job, and they missed their moment. With the banquet already underway behind closed doors, these bridesmaids could no longer serve their purpose. They dropped the ball. They failed their "calling" and the joyous celebration they had anticipated is now taking place without them ... and they now knew the painful regret of a missed opportunity to do what they were meant to do.

"Therefore keep watch," Jesus said, *"because you do not know the day or the hour."* Keep watch. Watch and be ready. Again, who knows what tomorrow may bring? Who knows if we might even have tomorrow? Be ready! Be prepared, so that if there is just a 90% chance of tomorrow, and if you were to be part of that unfortunate 10%, you would have nothing to apologize for, you would have no regrets! Be prepared to be the best you can be, for you never know just who or what may come your way that day. Be prepared so if you were offered a wonderful opportunity, you would be ready to step into your new role. Be prepared so that if some tragedy occurred in your life, you would be faithful and strong enough to stand and ride out the storm. And, as Paul intimates in our epistle reading, be prepared so that should you hear the shout of the archangel, *"The Bridegroom is coming"* and you hear that final trumpet ... which really could happen at any time ... that you can join the grand procession of all the faithful as the Bridegroom takes His bride, the Church, to her new eternal home.

Also edited out due to time constraints, but included here, an aside about that trumpet ... this would take a sermon in itself, but to put it succinctly, Paul uses the imagery of a Roman victory parade; as the conquering army would return to Rome, the trumpet would blow and everyone in the surrounding countryside would drop what they were doing and run to become part of the victory processional. This passage isn't about some "rapture" snatching Christians away before the "real" troubles come ... no, there is only one final trumpet, announcing the triumphant return of the conquering King of Kings once and for all).

Thought to be written twenty or so years after Jesus' resurrection, 1 Thessalonians appears to be the earliest writing we have in the New Testament; no gospel had yet been written. If New Testament books were ordered according to when they were written, 1 Thessalonians would be first. Paul writes to encourage these young Christians, and from his very first words, the notion of Christ's final return saturates the pages. Live for today, but live in full expectation that the final trumpet could come at any time! Live well, live faithfully, live today as if there is a tomorrow, knowing Jesus' triumphant return is the point to which all of life is moving. He will come. He will be victorious. And may He find us faithful when He returns. There really may be a 90% chance of tomorrow, but there is a 100% chance of Jesus returning to this world. It *could* happen tonight, it could happen years or even centuries from now. By the way, that's not a threat; it is a promise. We wait not with fear, but with faith.

Trumpet Ready Living: The coming of our Lord, the Bridegroom, is something we look forward to. In the meantime, we live for today, and we live for hope of tomorrow, knowing there is a trumpet waiting to be sounded that will mark the end of all sin, all sadness, all fear, all pain.

