

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC
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Luke 12: 32-38, 48b Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-16
Dressed for Action

Dressed for action. That's what Jesus tells us to be. But what action is that?

In the next couple of weeks in our lectionary scripture readings from Luke, Jesus talks about and tells parables about being ready. Many people treat these teachings and parables as prophecy. Is Jesus is telling the people the end times are coming, get ready? Or giving them comfort in their struggle, "things will get worse, the church will be persecuted, but I will return!" Be alert, be ready! Many, including the apostle Paul believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. But he did not.

So in our Hebrews text we hear, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." So is Jesus' yet-unseen-return the action we are to be prepared for? Are we to believe that the situation here and now is temporary, and have faith and put our hope in Jesus' return? Is this the action we are to dress for? But what about all the people over the ages who predicted Jesus was coming tomorrow? Again, what action are we to dress for?

Sandwiched in the middle of our readings from Luke and Hebrews was one line. Luke 12:48, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be

demanded.” This is curious, if Jesus were to come tomorrow, what difference would it make how much we had, little or a lot? If the end of the world were to happen tomorrow, what would be demanded of us? There would not be anything left for us to do, would there? No action and no dressing would matter would it?

So perhaps Jesus is not talking about something that is going to happen, or some moment of apocalypse or ending. Perhaps he is not talking about the future. Perhaps he is turning expectations, and prophecy, on its head like he does every time he preaches and teaches with parables. Perhaps he is talking about right now. Perhaps his urgency, perhaps his warning to be alert and ready and dressed is because he is calling us to action right now.

Remember that in Jesus’ day, many of the people who were following him were living subsistence lives. They did not know if they would have a next meal. Yet he says, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” It seems Jesus is always saying, be not afraid! This is a mark of faith especially in difficult times; to trust that God is present and wants our good, no matter what. Think what that means, not only our good, but a kingdom!

Then Jesus tells them and us, sell your possessions, and give alms! Many people had little to nothing, and he wants them to sell what they have? Few alms will come from them. Yet there are also people in the crowds following Jesus who did have possessions. He gives the same advice to both the poor and the rich.

“The Father wants to give you the kingdom, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Ah, now here may be the crux of the matter. Where is your treasure? If our hearts are tied up in the world and possessions, can we be dressed for action? But, I got asked the honest question this week, “Are we all called to sell everything?” “Are possessions inherently bad?” “Does God call all of us to lives as missionaries and serve like Mother Teresa?!” Later Peter asks Jesus, “Are you telling this to us or to everyone?” What do you all think?

What action are we to dress for? Are we called to dress for action here by giving up everything and working to save the world? Or by making a profession of faith in Jesus? Or by living a good life, attending church on Sunday, and giving from our treasures to help others?

There are many of us who would find a simple profession of faith to be enough. Others who would believe that our faith is seen by our actions. Still others who have given up much of what they have, and live a simple life dedicated to service. Which of these is right? Are any of these wrong?

A miracle in our lives is that God comes to each of us in the way we need. God has given each of us a unique existence to live. No one can make judgments, or live our lives for us. But, it can feel like a difficult and lonely thing to be uniquely human.

On the other hand we all have the same deep experience! We are all in this together. We all have the same questions: Why am I here? What is my life for? How do I find meaning? Where is God? Is there a heaven and what does it look like? How do I live a good life?

If we do this thing called church right, when one of us stumbles and falls, when our faith weakens and we doubt, we are here for each other. We are here to hold each other up, to support each other, to pray for each other. And we can admit to each other we too have doubts, struggles, and questions about God and faith. And we can be strengthened not only by each other's strengths but encouraged by the fact that others have questions and doubts.

Thomas Merton was a man who many revere as a famous writer, mystic and spiritual teacher. A monk in the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, he was a poet, social activist and student of comparative religion. He wrote than 70 books, on spirituality, social justice and peace.

This deeply spiritual man, who dedicated his life to serving God wrote a prayer like this: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will

never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone"

(Thoughts in Solitude).

So when we dress for action, what kind of action will it be? Each of us must answer that question for ourselves. Know that there is a different answer for each of us, and that there are different answers for each phase of our lives. But in the end, we can share the questions, and perhaps some of the action with each other.

And there is always God. In Jesus' parable, the Master returns and finds his servants alert and ready. He fastens his belt, has them sit down to eat, and comes and serves them. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Be ready, be dressed for action, for the Master is here amongst us now.