



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 7 August 2022

Pentecost 9

Wake up! Look lively! Be aware! The Lord is here!

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

This week's reflection will be delivered in person by the Rev Robert Chambers who is leading the worship in both Charges whilst Dean Reuben is visiting the Charge of St Brides Hyndland. Below is the outline of the words Dean Reuben will be sharing with the people gathering at Hyndland for your consideration too.

An Illustration to set the scene

A dinner party is a poised affair where respect and behaviour are important, and in the ancient Mediterranean world, religion and politics were often discussed, along with the proper duties of slaves, masters, wives and children, and the “**right way**” to order society.

We know that Luke wrote his Gospel for a man who held dinner parties – ***Theophilus***.

Any man who owned a book was, by definition, a person of means.

He would undoubtedly display his book to his friends, reading and discussing it with them.

But they were in for a shock when they heard what Luke had to say. *Because Luke's Gospel was like the embarrassing guest at a dinner party.*

Theophilus and his friends would probably have held Jesus the rabbi in high regard. Yet time and again, in his choice of stories, Luke is challenging the wealthy elite. **“Use your wealth for good,”** he tells them. **“Learn to serve those in need!”**

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's reading Jesus tells us to be like servants, not masters.

Being **“dressed for action”** means having your sleeves rolled up to get your hands dirty. And Jesus isn't simply saying we should be prepared to serve if called upon – *he's saying that our life's attitude should be one of practical service.*

This is what it means to be a servant.

Your position is not simply to muck in if needed, but to be waiting at all times, in every way, to serve: **“like those who are waiting for their master”**.

Whereas Luke's contemporaries would have thought that their slaves should look up to them as role models, Jesus says it should be the opposite way round. *The master should learn from the slave.*

We often think of this parable as being something to do with the second coming, partly because it refers to the master's **“return”**.

However, Jesus and Luke are unlikely to have meant this.

For Jesus, we must be ready at any time.

As for Luke, one of his major themes is that Jerusalem was manifestly unready for Jesus. Indeed, it's in Luke's Gospel alone that Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, because they could not see the day of their visitation by God.

Later in the Gospel, Jesus tells a story of a rich man who ignored Lazarus suffering at his gate – doubtless while he was entertaining wealthy friends.

The rich man was not ready for Jesus because he would not see and accept the need for practical service of those who were poor.

In the same way, Jesus' listeners – *Theophilus and his friends* – need to become like servants.

So this parable isn't about some far-off future event. It is about how we live our lives here and now.

Then comes the twist.

If the master finds his servants ready, he himself will roll up his sleeves – or, to use Jesus' idiom, “**fasten his belt**”.

He will have them sit down to eat and serve them.

Again, the point is made: if this is what God is like-the ruler of all- how much more should you earthly “rulers” be like him.

The image points not to the second coming of Jesus but to the first, and in particular the Last Supper, as related in John's Gospel, in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

Sometimes we turn Jesus' teaching into a simple devotion as we focus intently on the Lord.

Yet Jesus comes to us like the master in the parable whenever we are faced with someone who needs our Christlike compassion.

The insistent, blunt and repeated question is,
“Are you ready to serve?”

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Some of us get anxious when faced with a practical task or the prospect of mucking in with others.

Others seem to find it natural.

Yet Jesus charges all his followers with the same paradigm – **service is God’s way, and it must be ours, too.**

You may not see yourself as one of the elite, like Theophilus and his friends.

But there’s always someone you can serve.

The first question is: **“How can I use my gifts to serve others?”**

The second question is: **“How can I stretch myself to address the needs before me?”**

It’s not enough to slumber until something shouts at us.

Our charge is to be watchful, alert, active and thoughtful.

“Be like those who are waiting.” *Luke 12:36*

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