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Luke 19:11-27

WAIT 'TIL THE KING COMES HOME

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“Wait ‘til your father comes home!” What is your first reaction to those words? Did they fill you with fear and dread or did they fill you with joy and excitement? That depends, doesn’t it? If you were caught skipping school, cheating on a test or breaking a window by doing something stupid, you would be scared, very scared. You knew that you did something that was very bad and you knew that your father would punish you and deservedly so. If you got all A’s on your report card, made the basketball team or a lead part in the school play, it was a different story. You knew that your father would be very happy with you and might even take you out to one of your favorite places to celebrate the good news.

We are in the last few Sundays of the Church Year. At this time we turn our attention to the last things, the second coming of Christ, the final judgment and eternal life for all of Christ’s faithful. It will be a day dreaded by many while others look to heaven and count the days. WAIT ‘TIL THE KING COMES HOME!

We have been on a journey with Jesus for the last few months. His ministry was just about at an end. He set his face to go to Jerusalem where he would offer up his life for the sin of the world. He went from town to town, village to village, preaching, teaching, forgiving and healing. The journey was about to end. Jerusalem was now in sight. Expectations were high. The people “thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”

It was very clear that Jesus’ followers believed that once he entered Jerusalem, God’s kingdom was going to come immediately. They didn’t know exactly how it was going to come, but it was pretty clear that they expected some sort of political kingdom or one that came through military might. This would be a return to the glory days of Israel where Israel was a world power. The hated Romans would finally be driven out and Israel would be where they deserved to be. Everything was already set up. Pilgrims were already there. Hundreds of thousands of people were waiting for the Messiah. They knew that Jesus was arriving. Thousands more were following Jesus especially on the 18 mile hike from Jericho to Jerusalem. The crowds got bigger by the hour. It was also something that both the Pharisees and the Romans feared. What if this mindless rabble does follow Jesus?

In a sense they were right. God’s kingdom would come when Jesus would enter Jerusalem, but it would not come in the way that they expected. Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly at he would suffer, die and then rise from the dead. They simply could not and would not entertain the thought that the kingdom of God would come through Jesus dying a criminal’s death on the cross. They certainly were not expecting the suffering and humiliation that Jesus was about to endure and especially not the horror and embarrassment of the cross. Even after the resurrection they would still have questions about the coming of the kingdom. The king was completely in control. His death might look like defeat but it would triumphantly establish God’s kingdom.

“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.” Jesus was a man of noble birth. He came from the royal line of King David through both Mary and Joseph. But it was far more than that. His royal lineage traces back to heaven itself. This child conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to Mary was the very Son of God.

We can also identify the distant country. Jesus came down from heaven. The Creator became creature so that he could recreate that creation by taking upon himself the sin of the world, suffering and dying for those sins, rising again from the dead, and ascending back into heaven to be enthroned at the right hand of the Father. He receives his kingdom when his entire work of redemption is complete. And he gives us his promise that he is going to return!

“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put his money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’” The nobleman is first and foremost a giver of gifts. The number of ten is symbolic. The ten servants represent all Christians, the servants of Jesus Christ. He has entrusted a very precious capital to all of us that we are to put to work for him. That is the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commanded that the Gospel be preached to every creature. He commanded that every Christian be baptized into his name through the washing of water and the Word. He left to the Church the great treasure of the Lord’s Supper to be administered to the saints for the forgiveness of sins until he comes again. What boundless treasures Jesus has left to the Church! The forgiveness of sins, the robe of Christ’s own righteousness, adoption into Christ’s own family, peace with God, the joy of salvation and our ultimate home in heaven – these are the treasures that are held out to us and conveyed in Word and Sacrament. They are the Means of Grace. This is how God comes to us undeserving, lost sinners to bring us possession of salvation by faith and keep us in possession of it.

Since the kingdom is an ongoing reality wherever Jesus is, there is opposition to this kingdom. It was there during Jesus’ ministry and it still exists today. The Pharisees and scribes continually rejected Jesus’ teaching, took offense at his eating with tax collectors and sinners and rejected his miracles. They continued to reject him, demanding his death and refused to believe his resurrection. He was their only hope, yet they flatly rejected him. They said, “We don’t want this man to be our king!” They refused to see their sin. They refused to see their Savior. And they would not have Jesus to be that Savior! They proudly announced their rebellion against him.

Let’s first focus on the positive. The king returned, having received his kingdom. He returned to ascertain and to respond to what had taken place while he was gone. We know that Jesus will surely return to judge the living and the dead. He will demand an accounting.

This accounting is not an occasion for dread and alarm on the part of his servants. The tone is entirely friendly and optimistic. He will not inquire whether they have produced any dividends with the capital of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He fully expects them to have been faithful servants and to have produced some dividends. He will only inquire about what they have gained with the capital entrusted to them. He will do so in order that he may give them the reward of grace.

The first servants are happy to report good news. The gifts of the kingdom, Word and Sacrament, have produced a wonderful increase. The servants do not claim to have earned the additional money themselves. Rather they say, “Your mina has gained...” God’s kingdom spreads not through our persistence or cleverness. All the power lies in the Gospel itself. It alone produces spiritual gains.

Each servant would experience different results. One would see ten more minas, another five. The servants had been faithful. That’s all that God asks of any of us: be faithful! Jesus speaks wonderful words of grace. “Well done, my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.” The servant is given

a magnificent reward, rule over ten cities. The servant did not deserve such a huge reward. This was a reward of pure grace!

Jesus promises that on the Last Day he will reward his people with rewards of grace. We have all sinned against God and deserve his punishment, but through Christ our sins have been washed away. He gives us what we don't deserve. He gives us the very opposite of what our sins deserve. That is pure grace. If the rewards were dependent upon merit or productivity, they would have to be granted on a rigid scale. No human standards apply here. God's grace is free to make rewards as it sees fit. It doesn't necessarily look at outward results. We think of God's servants like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist whose preaching and teaching seemed to bring them nothing but opposition and hatred. Yet they were faithful even though their audience wasn't. God will reward these servants with rewards of grace in heaven.

I am always awestruck as I see the gifts that God has given to some of the pastors in his Church. They are able to lead huge congregations, teach at the Seminary, lead foreign mission fields and have time over to present 50 page papers at the drop of a hat. And there are others who are not so gifted. God simply says, "Be faithful with the gifts I give you!" We have all heard of Peter, James and John. What about the other James, the other Simon and the other Judas. They were all apostles. Even though none of their words were ever recorded in the Scriptures, they were faithful and now rule with our Lord Jesus in heaven.

There was another servant. He was different. He said, "Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow." This man professed to be a faithful servant of the king, but in reality he was a hypocrite. He was not faithful with the Gospel, either for himself or in sharing it with others. He claimed that Jesus was a harsh man and was afraid. That is an out and out lie. If he really was afraid, it should have compelled him to render at least some service, in order to escape punishment by such a severe, harsh master. The truth is that he had no love or respect for his master and his actions proved it.

His mina was taken away and given to the one who had ten. That seemed unfair to everyone. "He already has ten!" That is the principle of grace. Those who are faithful with God's gifts will be given even greater authority over the mysteries, but those who are not faithful will have the gifts taken away and added to those who are faithful. We either use the Gospel or it will be taken away. We cannot merely stand still. Either we grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ or we go backward.

The enemies who did not want Jesus to be king will be killed. They are banished into the outer darkness of hell. They rejected their king and their king will reject them. Jesus will have the last word. They have only themselves to blame for their unbelief and rejection of the king. It is a matter of life and death. Lord, keep us faithful to the Gospel!
AMEN.