

## **W Thomas – The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost Christ Episcopal Church, Elizabeth City NC – 08-10-25**

If you've come to church on a fairly regular basis, at some point you have said, Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. That should sound fairly familiar. And if you're hearing echoes of that as we hear this gospel being read, this be alert, be ready, be prepared portion of the gospel, you know, it is interesting to hear against that backdrop.

So let me tell you what I think I'm doing today. *This sermon asks what it means that you also must be ready. For the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. As we hear that, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* That second part is echoed from what we heard from the letter to the Hebrews. Now, let's talk about that sense of hope for, against the, now back to the master coming.

If you were awake, you would know you'd answer the door at that particular time. It's almost a trope. But I think it was in the movie Pets or in other places it occurs when the owner or the house leaves, when you leave and Ghost is home alone, okay, they're both, Ghost is at the door, the dog is at the door, jumping up and down, when's he going to come back? When's he going to come back? When's, hoping, hoping, that's an expression of utter, utter hope.

And then it's so surprised when he actually does come back. But that's the faith is assurance, it's all unfolds and it's all there. What is implicit as we listen to this particular gospel and what helps us with the notion of the writer of the Hebrews telling faces the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, that is a sense of, whoa, slow down.

Don't get all bent out of shape. Has it been 2000 years or so since Jesus died and rose again and ascended into heaven? It's been about that long. We can share all the ups and downs of history and we can begin to wonder at what point should he have come back again, considering that's a reasonable conjecture to have that in front of us.

And at the same time, we can try to be ready but the idea is are you ready where you're all shaking all the time that he's going to come and it's just going to be really awful and all of that. If you think about church architecture at all, okay? If you think about church architecture at all, you can see how various faith groups try to understand this. There are groups that have the sense that

Jesus is coming back tomorrow so why would they build a building that's any more than a few concrete blocks that could fall down in less than 20 years? And then there are people who build grand edifices and they're there but you can see how one is shaking like he's going to come right away.

I better make sure I'm always asking him every moment, what am I supposed to do next? And the other said, well, you know, going to get here eventually. I'm going to trust and show up at church on Sunday and everything's going to work out. You can see there's a balancing act.

And so within this, what is the best way to be ready? And I think you already know that because you're showing up at church on a regular basis. You're being aware of things. You engaged at some point in your life the parable of the talents from Matthew 25.

You know, the parable that Jesus teaches that the master went away and laid the three slaves stuff. One had one talent, one had two talents, one had five talents and he came back and all of a sudden, the one that had two said, master, I've returned four and the master said, well done, good and faithful servant. You have suffered over much. Come to the joy of your master.

And the one who had five returned 10 and received the exact same reward. Well done, good and faithful servant. You have suffered over much. Come and the joy of your master.

And then there was the one who said, oh, I knew you to be a hard master. I buried it. And you remember the, you worthless and slothful slave. You could have at least invested it with the bankers.

It's a little bit, we get to make the choices of how we engage. And so one thing that I think that helps guide me, one would simply be, how could I be somebody who could return back? Not to gain the master's favor, but to use the talents I've been given. So one way to do it is start with an attitude of loving kindness.

You've heard me talk about that and I've read those words from John McQuiston in his little book, the rules, you know, always we begin again, how to live in the rule of St. Benedict. That's why that's important to me. It's an overarching principle.

You can hear it in the echoing, the notion of justice coming out of Isaiah's mouth today. And that's like almost hanging on the same words of the prophets of Micah, Micah 6:8. Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. It's a point of understanding what is right relationship as we are doing what we do. And if we do it with an understanding that we are always doing this because we are the extension of Christ's love in the world.

We can do nothing to gain God's favor. We already have that. That's the grace.

That's what's prayed for. When we say faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It's not an insurance policy where we buy an outcome.

It's assurance so that we know, we set our heart on, we believe, we know about this relationship that is so fully given to us. And then the opportunity is for how do we live into that relationship? How are we ready for when the master comes again? And if we live our lives as scripture teaches, as we go out and see those in need and care for them, try to make thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, because that's really my understanding of how it works, that all of a sudden it will be the master sitting us down at the table and serving us. And is that not what the banquet of heaven just might be? It's almost as if I don't have to worry about when he's coming again, because I'm already ready, because he's walking with me, and hopefully I am walking with him.

And it shouldn't be a surprise, but a moment of joy. And the other piece that goes hand in hand with that is even in the moments of our darkest and deepest despair, where we cannot see this particular joy, perhaps a glimmer will come just by doing what we are doing when we find and share a sense of loving kindness. Maybe in that we are brought out of whatever it is that's keeping our eyes down to a small space in front of us, but to the open vista of all the possibilities that come from knowing how loved we are and what it is that the fullness of grace given to us with the hope and expectation that we might share it with others.

And maybe someday hear the echo, well done, good and faithful servant, you have suffered over much, come into the joy of your master.

All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.