

When you were a child, did you play the game, "Hide and Go Seek"? The person who is "IT" closes his or her eyes, counts to ten, and then searches for the other children who are hiding. **"1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10--Ready or not, here I come!"**

**Something like that is going on in our text.** The master is off to a wedding banquet. His servants are caring for the family farm. Some are alert, ready for his return; some are not ready. The countdown has begun. No one knows exactly when the master will return. At the end of our story, Jesus says, ***"You ... must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour"*** (Luke 12:40).

**Clearly, Jesus is talking about his Second Coming.** Clearly, Jesus is speaking of his return at the end of the world. Clearly, we must be ready to meet him when he returns in power and majesty. We don't know when that will be, but we are called to wait with patience and act with faithfulness, like good servants. **The countdown has begun.**

**We live between the lightning and the thunder.** The First Coming of Christ is like the lightning. **NOW WE WAIT UNTIL THE THUNDER HITS!!** We all know once one hits the other will follow. The countdown has started: 1-2-3-4.... **The Second Coming of Christ is like that.** We know it's coming, but we don't know when it will arrive. Between the lightning and the thunder we are called to wait with patience and faith and act with faithfulness and obedience to the master's teaching. **The countdown has begun for the Second Coming.**

**In addition, the countdown has begun for our death.** At death, as well as at the Second Coming of Christ, we must be ready to meet the Lord face-to-face. **We don't know when we will die, but we are called to wait patiently and act faithfully in this in-between time.**

**In this in-between time, before the Second Coming of Christ and before we die, the servants of God are called to wait with FAITH.** That means that we believe what the master said. We trust him. We trust his Word. We are called to treasure his Word. Jesus said, ***"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"*** (Luke 12:34).

The world may live in fear because the people of the world don't know what is happening, ***but we, the disciples of Christ, have been told what is coming at the end of time and at the end of our time.*** Therefore, we can be ready to meet Christ with faith and hope in our hearts. ***Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"*** (Luke 12:32).

**"Ready or not, here I come" Jesus said. Death sometimes comes unexpectedly.**

A couple from Minneapolis decided to go to Florida to thaw out during one particularly icy winter. They planned to stay at the very same hotel where they spent their honeymoon twenty years earlier. Because of hectic schedules, it was difficult to coordinate their schedules, so the husband left Minneapolis and flew to Florida on Thursday with his wife scheduled to fly down the next day. The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room, so he decided to send an email to his wife. **Accidentally, he left out one letter in her email address and without realizing it, sent the email message to the wrong person.** Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a minister of many years who was called home to glory following a sudden heart attack. The widow decided to check her email since she was expecting messages of condolence from relatives and friends. After reading the first message, she fainted. The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor and was amazed by what he saw on the computer screen.

**(To: My loving wife--Subject: I've arrived)** I know you're surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send emails to your loved ones. I've just arrived and have been checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was P.S. **It sure is hot down here!** *The widow wasn't ready for that message. It was a mistake.*

***The time will come when we get the message saying that the time has come for us to die. It won't be a mistake.***

**We are called to be ready for DEATH by having faith and hope in Christ.**

**Harry Andersen was ready.** He had terminal cancer but kept his sense of faith and hope alive. His pastor could tell he was ready because they talked about Christ's death and resurrection and what this event means for us when we die. **Harry showed no fear since he believed the promises of God.** In addition, a sign of Harry's faith and hope was expressed in the humor he shared with his pastor.

After scripture reading and prayer, Harry told the pastor the story of a man who was dying of cancer. He was bedridden on the second floor of his house. He could smell the aroma of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven downstairs. He loved chocolate chip cookies. As a matter of fact, they were his favorite. He forced himself to get out of bed and crawled to the flight of steps leading downstairs. Each step brought new pain to his body, but he had to have some of those chocolate chip cookies. When he got to the bottom of the stairs, he crawled to the kitchen table and reached up for a cookie. Suddenly, his wife appeared out of nowhere and slapped his hand with a spatula. "Why did you do that?" he cried out. **"Those cookies are for your funeral reception," she said.** Harry Andersen laughed out loud as he told the story. The pastor rolled on the floor with laughter at the unexpected ending. Then Harry said, ***"That's just the kind of thing my wife would do."***

Just then Harry's wife walked into the room. **"I wouldn't do that,"** she said smiling at the pastor, "but there's something else I'd like to do at Harry's funeral."

"What's that?" asked the pastor. "I'd like to pass out to each person who arrives for the funeral, a chocolate cookie in a plastic bag." "Yes," she said. "I love the story about the woman who went to many church potlucks and always rejoiced when she was given a new plastic fork at the end of the meal. That meant that homemade pie was being served for dessert. When she got the fork, she always said, ***'The best is yet to come.'*** **For Harry, a fresh chocolate chip cookie out of the oven reminds him that, *'The best is yet to come.'***"

A few weeks later, Harry died. As the parishioners arrived at the church door, they were each given a plastic bag with a cookie. When they asked the reason for this unusual gift, they were told that they would hear more about it later. The title of the pastor's funeral sermon was, **"The Best Is Yet To Come."** He explained that Jesus died for us that we might be forgiven and go to heaven. "It is the Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom" he said, quoting Luke 12:32. Then he told the story of the woman who loved homemade pie at the end of church potlucks and he pointed out that **Harry was being buried with a plate of Chocolate Chip Cookies in his casket** because when we have faith and hope in the Lord each day, ***the best is yet to come.***

**Harry was ready to meet Jesus. Some people aren't. Their hearts are set on the treasures of this world instead of heaven. They don't wait patiently for the Lord with faith and hope. They don't act faithfully with their eyes focused on the Lord, their lamps lit and dressed for action (Luke 12:35).**

**It's always good to check the context, the background of a sermon text.** Both the front side context and the back side context of this parable add meaning to our story. **The front side context** (Luke 12:13-31) is about a **rich, but foolish,** farmer who believed in and sought possessions in this life as if they were the ultimate goal of life. **The back side context** (Luke 12:41-48) is **about a servant who mistreated his fellow servants** because he didn't think he'd ever have to face the absent master again. This evil servant lived as if he were the master, eating and drinking excessively. He was saying, ***"The master is away, I can do whatever I wish."***

Jesus said, ***"... The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know ... and will put him with the unfaithful"*** (Luke 12:46). **There is punishment for evil deeds.**

***In other words, we are not just called to believe in the master. We are not only called to realize that we will face him again at the end of time or at the end of our lives, whichever comes first.*** In addition, we are also called to act on these beliefs. We are called to be "dressed for action and have our lamps lit" (Luke 12:35). We are called to make faith active in the way we live for God and people. Sometimes there are demonic factors that seem to make it nearly impossible to put our faith into action. These factors can be overcome, but not if we keep them secret. **Secrets make us sick.** Secrets have to be revealed before anything can be done about them. **The beginning of forgiveness is to bring secret sins out of hiding.**

A woman named Mary came to her pastor for counseling one day. After the preliminaries, Mary confessed that she had done many things in her past that made her feel ashamed. ***"My behavior has not been that of a Christian,"*** she said. Then she went on to explain that she had had sex many times before she was married and had committed adultery after she was married. "I've tried to confess my sins to God," she said, "and I know the Bible says that he forgives me, but I just don't feel forgiven. My marriage is falling apart. I feel guilty about the past, fearful of the future, and inhibited in the present." The pastor prayed privately, ***"Lord, help me to find some way to help Mary."*** When Mary finished her story, the pastor asked her to stand in front of a crucifix he had on his wall. "That's where you're headed when you die," he said. "One day, you will see Jesus face-to-face."

**"Yes," she said, "I know, and I'm not ready."**

"Right now, you are burdened by your past," the pastor told her. "It's like you are carrying a bag of rocks on your back." He walked over to the corner of the room where he recently had placed a bag of rocks he had taken from church property during a church clean-up day. He hoisted the heavy bag onto Mary's back and asked her to grab it. "You are carrying a bag of rocks from your past," he said. "That's the guilt you feel for what you've done. The reason you feel stuck in the present is because of that guilt. Your fear of the future also makes you feel stuck in the present. Do you want to continue carrying this bag of rocks?"

**"No," Mary said. "It's heavy."** "Then let Jesus have it. He died on the cross to take your bag of rocks from you. You can't carry those rocks. He can. Your only job is to let him have your bag of rocks and not pick it up again." **The pastor took the bag of heavy rocks from Mary's back. "That's what the forgiveness of sins is like,"** he said. **A week later, Mary told the pastor, "For the first time in my adult life, I feel free to live my faith with faithfulness. It's like a new world."**

"It is a new world," the pastor responded. "It's called the kingdom of God. When you gave your bag of rocks to the Lord, you got a foretaste of what it will be like when you go to heaven."

Together they turned to Luke 12:32. "Maybe you'd like to read it out loud," the pastor suggested. Mary read, **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."**

**"You are ready to meet the Lord," the pastor told her.**

**Jesus told his followers that he would return.** He told them to be ready for his return at the end of time. He also urged us to be ready for our end time, when we die and come before his throne of grace. He doesn't ask us to be perfect. He asks us to wait with faith and hope and act faithfully with obedience to what he has taught us. He wants us to be ready.

**In the child's game of "Hide and Go Seek" there's a countdown. MY FRIENDS...THERE IS ALSO A COUNT-DOWN within OUR LIVES.**

**"1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. Ready or Not, here I come!" Ask yourself..."WILL I BE READY?" Only You know the answer to that question...Remember, what Jesus said, *"Be Dressed for Action, and Have Your Lamps Lit!"***

**YES, HE COULD COME AT ANY TIME!!! What are you doing to get ready?**

**Amen.**