

"Christmas in August"

Luke 12:32-40

The master has been out at a wedding. He's had a great time, the food's been superb, and finally it's time to go home.

But there is a ton of extra food, and he just happens to be good friends with the Host, so he is one of the lucky ones who gets leftovers. So with his arms full of pasta salad and salmon and beef and *even half of one of those fancy Borracchini wedding cakes*, he finally arrives at the door of his house. His hands are so full though he can't even open the door! He has to sort of knock at it with his elbow, hoping that someone inside hears.

Now here we pause. See, here as the master is poised at the door trying to get someone to let him in so that he can share his party bounty, Jesus tells us that there are two possible endings. The story can end in two possible ways.

Here's the first way: The master is standing there, arms full, pounding on the door, and his slaves have been waiting for the knock. I mean, they have been *waiting* for this

knock! They know their master, and they know he loves to bring home food to share. So that knock on the door immediately wakes them up, they jump out of bed clothes already on cause they had gone to sleep dressed and they run to open the door. The master walks inside, sets down the food, straps on an apron, and immediately starts serving up plates of salmon and Borracchini wedding cake to all.

That's Way #1.

But then there's Way #2. Way #2 is the master comes home, his arms full of first-class food, and starts pounding away at the door. But this time, he knocks... and he knocks... and he knocks. And nobody comes to the door! See, this time, the slaves don't wake up. They keep sleeping right through all of the master's knocking.

Now what's all of our first thought about the slaves? Those lazy slaves! All they had to do was stay awake for their master and they couldn't do it!

But here's the thing, the parable doesn't say the slaves are lazy.

You know, I wonder. I wonder if the slaves of the second way aren't lazy but just worn out. I wonder, in fact, if they've have worn themselves out from *vigilance*. Perhaps they've been vigilantly keeping watching for their master, making sure that everything was just so for his arrival. They knew their master liked a clean house, so they spent all day long scrubbing the floors and washing blinds. And whenever they had a spare minute they were straining their eyes out the window to see if he was coming back. Anyone would be exhausted at the end of a day like that!

I know that I've done a very similar thing. There were a couple of times when I had family or friends come visit me in Dallas that I spent the day and a half before they arrived scrubbing the tub and down on my hands and knees mopping the floor. My house was sparkling when they arrived, but I was exhausted!

They slaves are exhausted. And so now they are sleeping hard. They might hear something knocking, but they're so tired that they just roll

over, pull the covers up over their heads, mumble a few words and keep on sleeping.

See, where the slaves of Way #2 go wrong isn't that they're lazy. It's that they're forgetting what the master is really like. They remember that he's strict, but they forget what he's strict *about*. And when the master is Jesus, the master is strict about us being awake enough to spend time with him. The spick-and-span floors are nice, but they're so very secondary.

It's like Mary and Martha. Martha misses out on the whole *point* of service and hard-work when she is so caught up with her cleaning that she doesn't join her sister Mary in spending time with Jesus. She was preparing for Jesus, but so consumed with preparing she forgot to make time for the one she was preparing *for*. The slaves who are exhausted by all of their work make Martha's same mistake. They forget the end goal: spending time with the master.

Now, I want to pause for a second here. Because I've just spent the last seven or so minutes talking about slaves and their master—and that's

supposed to a metaphor for us and Jesus.

You know, maybe if we didn't know how destructive the master-slave relationship is, we could just move on. Maybe if our country didn't still bear the scars of the slaveowner's whip, we wouldn't need to be bothered. But we do know how vicious slave-holding is.

And we do have a history that bears witness to violence of masters toward slaves. I can't completely solve why Jesus compares our relationship to God to a master-slave relationship. But there are a couple of things I want us to notice. First, if Jesus is comparing himself to a slaveowner, this is one strange slaveowner. This master comes home and instead of demanding his slave to clean his shoes, he has her sit down and he comes and he serves her. He gives her good food to eat. He gives and does not take. Second, we also need to hold the master-slave relationship in the light of the other ways the Bible describes our relationship to God. As father/child. As friend to friend. As groom and bride. All of which undermine the master/slave image.

Jesus is the strange master who serves. Jesus is not really a master at all. And neither are we really slaves.

We're not really slaves because Jesus isn't into getting us to do things by coercion. Jesus doesn't force us to do anything. Jesus wants more from us than just behavior modification. He wants a heart that is so excited to be with him that it jumps out of bed at two in the morning and comes running for the door!

You know, sometimes I worry that we are more like the slaves in Way #2. What if we are wearing ourselves out and will be unable to wake up to the feast that is waiting for us downstairs? That is something I worry about for us as a church. God has called us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house those without homes. Each of those things we should do because in doing them we grow closer to Christ. But I worry that sometimes we can get so wrapped up in those things that we tire ourselves out and miss the feast of enjoying God's presence. I worry that being a part of the church simply becomes more tasks to get done in a life that is defined by making checklists.

See, God wants Way #1 for us. Blessed, Jesus says, are the slaves who are awake enough to open the door to the master with his arms full of feast food. Blessed are we when we haven't exhausted ourselves over things that don't matter. Blessed are we when don't forget that our work in this world is secondary to being awake to Christ. Blessed are we when we live in anticipation of the heavenly banquet where Jesus will strap on his apron and serve us macadamia encrusted mahi-mahi.

All of the wonderful ways that each of you serve the church—arranging flowers, doing the finances, calling to check in on sick church members, sharing your musical gifts, doing coffee fellowship, reaching out to the community—each of those I hope is a way of getting ready to see Christ face-to-face. Each of those I would hope isn't a frantic trying to please God, but instead is like a child putting on their Christmas pajamas, getting ready for, anticipating the gifts that are going to show up the next morning.

See, eager anticipation is what this whole parable of the master and the slaves is about. This is where the

slaves of Way #1 get it so right! The slaves eagerly anticipate the return of the master because they know that this master is like no other master. This master comes with good gifts.

Our life lived in the expectation of Jesus's arrival is like kids waiting for Christmas morning. Now kids who have been waiting for Christmas morning for the entire month of December, if you came in at 6am and told them that Santa Claus had come, would they get out of bed? YES! If you came in at 2am and told them their gifts were under the tree, would they shoot downstairs faster than you'd ever seen? YES!

When you know that there could be that new Pokemon Gameboy game under the tree or that new Harry Potter book that you've been waiting for, you are READY.

Christmas changes a little bit when you get older. I think this last Christmas we didn't get up till 9 and then we had a lazy breakfast and then we finally went into the living room to start opening presents. Presents are still awesome—they're just not quite as awesome as when you're ten.

Growing older may mean that Christmas morning presents aren't as exciting, but I hope that growing older doesn't mean we're so exhausted by life that we forget to anticipate the real Christmas.

Christmas is Christ's mass. It's the mass, the coming to be with us, of Jesus. Christmas morning in Bethlehem of Judea, 2000 years ago, God showed up at the door of humanity, and knocked. And through the Holy Spirit God keeps on knocking.

Are we so tired out by life and our tasks that we can't get up and answer the door? Or do we still have it within ourselves to become like children, to go to sleep with the anticipation of the kingdom of God, so that we can wake up to the feast of Christ's mass?

Jesus wants more from us than a clean house on Christmas morning. Not that a clean house is a bad thing, but Jesus wants more. Jesus wants us! Jesus wants us to show up excited. To run to the door, to fling it open and to allow ourselves to be served by this strange Master of ours.

See, God has brought home a feast for us. And the feast is Jesus. The feast is the overflowing richness of restored communion with God. Let's not tire ourselves out with secondary concerns. Because Christmas morning is coming. The feast is made. The presents are wrapped. Jesus is knocking. Are we awake?

Amen.