coming of Jesus as a baby or the second coming of Christ as the Lord of glory is a blessed event, but it will not be so blessed if we are not prepared and eager for the arrival of our Savior and Redeemer.

Sadly, it seems part of our human nature to resist being told what to do. Harry R. Truman (not Harry *S.*) was born October 30, 1896. His birthday is not important, but the day he died is. Truman was an American businessman, bootlegger, and prospector. He lived near Mount St. Helens, an active volcano in the state of Washington, and was the owner and caretaker of Mount St. Helens Lodge at Spirit Lake near the base of the mountain. Truman came to fame as a folk hero in the months leading up to the volcano’s 1980 eruption after refusing to leave his home despite evacuation orders. Truman was killed by a pyroclastic flow that buried his lodge under 150 feet of volcanic debris.

Truman died May 18, 1980; the day Mount St. Helens erupted. He reminds us of Jesus’ comment: “Understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” (v. 43). Not Truman. He refused to be told what to do. He loved the mountain, no doubt; but he was cantankerous and stubborn, and many thought he was an old fool.

Like Truman, we fail to prepare for a variety of reasons. As one expert explains: People do not prepare for emergencies because they believe: “Everything will be fine.” “The odds of a disaster are too small.” “I’ll jinx the whole thing if I prep.” “The government will save me.” “Someone else has prepped enough for the both of us.” “I don’t have enough room.” “I don’t have enough time.” “People will think I’m crazy.” “I don’t have enough money.” “I don’t have the right skills.” “I refuse to give in to fear and paranoia.” “I’m too old.” “My faith will save me.” Everyone can identify with at least one of these excuses. They range from unreasonable optimism to disbelief, denial, doubt, fear, and a hope and a prayer: “Worst case scenario, someone will rescue me.”

Jesus seems to say otherwise: “Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left” (v. 40). The apostle Paul reinforces the idea that there is a Rubicon that one crosses, a point of no return, a missed opportunity when additional chances are not possible. He writes: “*Now* is the acceptable time; see, *now* is the day of salvation!” (2 Corinthians 6:2, italics added). Our text is the *carpe diem* of the New Testament. Seize the day! Stay awake. Prepare and get ready! There is not a moment to lose!

Even Jesus does not know when he will return. He explicitly says that the “Son” does not know the “day or hour” (v. 36). Being ready would not be a problem if we knew when Jesus would return. If we knew, we could party hardy and sober up prior to his arrival. Here, as is always the case, God reveals enough about the future to give us hope, but not so much that we do not have to live and walk by faith day after day.

We need to hear what Jesus says: “About that day and hour, no one knows” (v. 36). He could not be any clearer. When will he return? “No. One. Knows.” So, we must be in a state of readiness. If we know when company is coming, we can postpone cleaning the house until days before their arrival. But we do not know when Jesus will come again. Thus, we must be ready, “for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (v. 44).

The Bible offers some advice on being prepared. “The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down” (Proverbs 21:20). “Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do,* but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Likewise, we be ready to welcome Jesus whenever he appears. Be ready always to serve God and your neighbor. Be ready to live as a witness to the Gospel, showing love and grace and mercy and compassion and generosity. Be ready to act in ways that usher in God’s promised kingdom. Be ready to be faithful, even in adversity.

This is what Paul means when he advises the Ephesians church to “[make] the most of time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). This verse follows Paul’s call to action: “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead!” Paul follows this up with a caution: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.” We must “redeem” the time we have, as the King James Version puts it; be on high alert and ready to welcome Jesus, be a servant of God and our neighbor, and “be careful then how we live” (v. 15) in the meantime.

A person who lives in a state of readiness is a person who looks for opportunities to glorify God. Such a person lives in anticipation of teachable moments and is aware of dangers along the way. He or she pays attention to possible pitfalls or potential dangers. They see the signs that say, “Mind your head,” or “watch your step.”

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the season of preparation leading up to Christmas. Barbara Brown Taylor called this the “New Year’s Day for Christians — the first Sunday of the new church year — which sets our sights on the birth of the Messiah four weeks from now. Good news! The Christ is coming! It’s time to get the nursery ready and reorder your priorities, because every urgent thing in your life is about to kneel before the one important thing that wants to be born anew in you: Emmanuel, which is to say: the God in you, the God in the person sitting next to you, the God with us, above us, below us, and among us, willing to be made known through us, and at the same time willing to become small enough to hold in our arms. This baby’s on the way.” And we need to be prepared for his arrival.

There is a story told of a woman who received a note from Jesus saying, “I will visit you today.” She furiously tore around her house cleaning and baking and making things presentable for such a distinguished visitor. As she bustled about the door rang. She opened the door to find a poor beggar asking for some money. “I can’t help you now,” the woman said, “I’m preparing for Jesus to arrive.” A little later the bell rang again. It was a young mother asking if she could borrow some milk for her child. “Come back later,” the woman said, “I’m preparing for Jesus to arrive.” A third time the bell rang. It was a day laborer asking if the woman would hire him. “Sorry,” she said, “Not now. I’m preparing for Jesus to arrive.” Sometime later there was a knock on the door. The woman opened the door, and a delivery boy handed her a telegram from Jesus. It read: “I visited you three times today, as a beggar, a young mother, and a laborer, but you were not ready to receive me.”

Advent is the time of preparation leading up to the birth of Jesus. We spend a lot of time and effort preparing our homes, preparing meals, preparing gifts. We do not know when Jesus will appear, but we can be prepared for the moment when Jesus wants us to show up in his name in the lives of those around us. In his name, we love, we serve, we show kindness. In short, we live as though Jesus has already come again. For indeed he has…in us!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, I want to be prepared and waiting when you come. Quicken my heart with your Spirit so that I can be alert and ready, anticipating your great victory and longing for your great triumph when you come. Use me to prepare others with eagerness and excitement about your return in glory. May we, the church of this generation, be ready when the day of victory, rejoicing, and triumph occurs. In Your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

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**State of Readiness**

1st Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2022 [Matthew 24:36-44](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+24%3a36-44&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

When I was in the Boy Scouts, we often repeated the motto: “Be Prepared.” This meant that before every camping trip, we prepared for rattlesnake bites, sprained ankles, intestinal troubles, poison ivy, wet or cold weather (both, always!), a lacerated arm, the sudden appearance of a grizzly bear or mountain lion, sunstroke, and dehydration. We were, in the words of Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Boy Scouts, prepared “for any old thing.” Which is why a good Scout always has a first-aid kit, a pocketknife, rain gear, flashlight, map, compass, matches, water bottle, sun protection, food, and dry clothes ready for any contingency.

Readiness applies in many other situations as well. What if there were a medical crisis at home or at work? Is a first-aid kit available? Are emergency phone numbers on hand? Are fire extinguishers working? Are smoke alarms installed? Are flashlights available? What about high-anxiety moments that can occur while driving? Is the spare tire inflated? Are all the pieces for the jack in place? Is the vehicle equipped with a can of compressed air, flares and a tool kit tricked out with screwdrivers, pliers, WD-40, and duct tape? Is there a blanket, water, and a shovel for snowy weather? This line of thinking helps us consider whether we are in a “state of readiness” for the coming of Christ.

One might say that readiness is *being reasonably prepared for possible contingencies.* Noah did not wait until it started raining to build the ark. New York City restaurant owners boarded up their windows ahead of Hurricane Irene in 2011. Being reasonably prepared for possible contingencies is good, old-fashioned common sense.

Abraham Lincoln said: “If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend six hours sharpening my axe.” Stephen Kin wrote: “There’s no harm in hoping for the best as long as you’re prepared for the worst.” Benjamin Franklin quipped: “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” Ezra Taft Benson preached: “It is easier to prepare and prevent than to repair and repent.” John F. Kennedy reminded us: “The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining.”

Being in a constant state of readiness might mean jacking up *preventive maintenance*. This applies to faith, health, and wellness, as well as the upkeep of machinery, roads, and the nation’s infrastructure. In our text, Jesus talks about being in a state of readiness. The