

Lamp o'clock

Luke 12:32-40

8-7-22

HWD

An Instagram influencer I follow

—you all know what an influencer is—

a social media marketing strategy

where a social media account/person

is paid by a company to recommend its products
to followers of that account.

So, an influencer account I follow,

it's a great home renovation/

DIY/cooking Instagram account

has coined the term, 'lamp o'clock.'

This, the influencer has dubbed,

is the time of day,

mostly around late afternoon, early evening,

when your overhead lights are not enough

or even too much

and yet it is dark enough in your house

that you need some soft lighting...

hence it is the perfect time of day

to turn on your house lamps.



I can almost see Jesus declaring it lamp o'clock

and telling his disciples

to take a seat on the sofa

because he wants to continue conversation.

Lamp o'clock.

“Be dressed for action

and have your lamps lit.”

Lamp o'clock isn't exactly

what Jesus is talking about.

But!

In a way, lamp o'clock
is the lighting of lamps to prepare
for the night that lies ahead.

I accuse my family all the time of
waiting too long to turn on the lamps.
I will come home and call them vampires
for not turning on some lamps!

Who sits around
waiting for it to get too dark
so that on their way to light a lamp,
they run the risk
of stubbing their toe on a coffee table?

So, when Jesus talks
about being dressed and having your lamps lit,
he is talking about the action of preparation.
This is not him
telling the disciples and now us,
that it is fine to wait around
until you have the time,
or until the kids are older and move out,
or when you retire.

This is advice for preparing right now
for what lies ahead.



These short little passages
follow Jesus' saying about being anxious.
If perhaps, we are prepared,
then anxiousness has less of an opportunity
to take a foothold in our lives.
"Right after [these passages]
is the parable of the faithful and unfaithful slaves.

[the ones who are prepared for the return of the master
and those who are not.]

The message of this juxtaposition is:
Don't be anxious. Just be ready!"¹

There is a four-letter word that ties us,
the little flock,
to the stories of lamps, slaves, masters, and thieves.
That four-letter word is fear.²
Don't be anxious, just be ready!
Keep your lamps lit.

You remember the psalm we sang as children, in VBS right?

"Thy word is a *lamp* unto my feet
and light unto my path."

Do you know the second verse?

"When I feel *afraid*, and think I've lost my way,
still, you're right beside me.
Nothing will I *fear*, as long as you are near
—please be near me to the end..."

Do not be afraid little flock,
it is the Father's good pleasure
to give you the kingdom.

The kingdom isn't about anxiety.
The kingdom isn't about what you have
but what you're willing to give away.

You don't have to give up everything,
be we all know there is *freedom*,
there is *salvation* in having less.

The kingdom is near, it is upon us
—do you see—
we don't wait around for it!
We are prepared to encounter
God's kingdom at any moment

¹ Alyce McKenzie, <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/mise-en-place-alyce-mckenzie-08-02-2013>

² Jerusha Matsen Neal, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-luke-1232-40-5>

because the kingdom is at hand,
it is near, it is upon us.
Keep your lamps lit.

How many of us here would want a heads up
if we were to have a guest come visit?

I would wager most of us,
because then you can prepare.

Some of us like
the unexpected pop-in,
or at least know that moment of surprise
when we learn Uncle So and So
is thirty minutes away
and he and Aunt Whoever
are planning to stay the week.

—so how many of us have a guest bedroom
with clean sheets on the bed?

Clean sheets, clean towels in the bathroom,
that is preparing.

Because if you are preparing
for the master to return,
then you will not be caught off guard;
be it the bridegroom or the master,
you won't be anxious when he comes back.

That's the parable Jesus tells.



Be dressed, Jesus says, be ready.

Men wore long flowing, loose robes in the 1st century.

Therefore, girding one's loins,
meant to gather up that long robe
and tie it around your waist,
for the work you were preparing to do.

Slaves also were to keep their lamps
full of oil and burning,

so that they can see to respond instantly
should their master return
in the middle of the night or near dawn
—perfect times for lamps.
It is always lamp o'clock when you are a servant.

Only by living and being in such readiness
would servants be prepared
to welcome the master properly
when he comes home
and knocks at the door.³

The parable tells us
that when the master finds
that his slaves had been preparing for him,
he ties up his robes,
he girds his loins
and turns the tables on everything
by inviting the slaves
to sit down and eat with him.
His return becomes an unexpected feast
to those who were usually the uninvited.

“Being ready...is less about
any actual time and place
and more about imagining Jesus' activity in the world,
when and where you least expect it
or imagine seeing it.
In other words, waiting around,
waiting for instructions,
is not going to cut it.”⁴

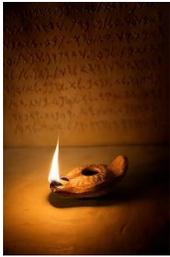
But if we are imagining,
if we are expecting to see the work of Christ in the world,
then it seems like we can expect
to be bombarded by glimpses

³ Alyce McKenzie, <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/mise-en-place-alyce-mckenzie-08-02-2013>

⁴ Karoline Lewis, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-luke-1232-40-3>

of the kingdom.
Do not be afraid little flock...
Throughout Luke's gospel
and follow up in the book of Acts,
there is a common thread of seeing God's creative,
on-going activity alive
and at work in the world.
Especially in unexpected ways
or among those the who are disregarded and uninvited.⁵

Which makes the next parable shocking.



Instead expecting and preparing
for the bridegroom to come home with the bride,
or for the master to return to his home;
Jesus explains the need to be prepared
because a thief is not going to tell you
when he is coming to break into your home.

We went from don't be anxious,
to don't be afraid little flock,
to prepare for the joyous entrance
of the bridegroom and bride,
to keep your lamps lit
for the return of the master
who will host a feast,
to be ready
—because a thief is coming
to break in at an unexpected hour
and the Son of Man comes just like that too.

That is unsettling.

⁵ ibid

It is jarring.

Is Jesus this thief?

Is the Savior of the world
the one who could come at any given time
and break into our homes,
break into our lives?

As frightening as that may sound,
if Jesus is the thief,
then what if he is here to break in and steal
the false priorities we have placed on our things?
The stuff we were supposed to give away earlier
so that we'd have treasure in heaven?

What if this thief "returns
to toss [out] our complacency and lack of urgency.
We will never be the same again,
nor will our house,
once he returns."⁶

But if we have prepared for this moment,
if we are the kind of disciples
who have been preparing,
have been the ones
imagining all the ways
that Christ will show up;
if we are the ones who are dressed and ready;
if we have tied our robes around our waist
and are eager to do the work of God's kingdom
—then we won't be caught off guard at all.

If we have prepared,
then our homes would be filled
with God's priorities.

Our lives will be empty of things
that would make us self-righteous and smug,
willing to sitting around

⁶ Alyce McKenzie, <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/mise-en-place-alyce-mckenzie-08-02-2013>

and wait on God's kingdom.
We won't be anxious or worried if we are ready.

We won't have anything to fear
because our worth and identity
are in being claimed by Christ
and not our stuff.

We'll be dressed and ready
because even if we don't know the time,
middle of the night or near dawn,
—it is always lamp o'clock.

And when that time comes,
“this thief won't have much to steal
but lots to work with.”⁷

⁷ ibid