

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two weeks ago I went out to dinner with two of my friends from seminary. While we were eating our waitress came and sat with us for a few minutes and asked us what we did for a living and what brought us to Pittsburgh. One of my friends shared that all three of us were pastors, two of us were in town for a conference and he was a pastor a half an hour away. As our night went on, our waitress kept coming back to our table to check in and each time she would sit down for a while and talk with us about a relationship that she was in and what God might think about some of the things that were happening in it. She shared that she has prayed about this relationship, but didn't know what God was telling her to do. So we talked for a while and she thanked us for our time. We reminded her that God was with her in the decisions that she needed to make. As my friends and I left the restaurant, we were reminded that God calls us to be alert and to show his love when we might not expect to.

As I read the texts for today, I was reminded of this interaction two weeks ago. Two themes from today's scripture readings jumped out at me. The first: God keeps his promises. Second: Be Alert.

In our Old Testament text from Genesis Abram had a vision from the Lord telling him that he would have descendants, as many as the stars. The passage from Hebrews refers to Old Testament stories of God's promises. We are reminded that God kept his promise with Abraham. He had descendants, as many as the stars in heaven.

Finally, in the gospel text Jesus tells us, the little flock, to not be afraid. He also tells us to be alert because we do not know when God is coming.

God keeps his promises as we have seen in today's texts. God gave Abraham descendants. God promises to keep his flock. God promises to love us, to care for us, to be there for us. God is there in every decision. He is there each day as we go to work, are at home, at school, or with our family. God is present when we play with our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friends. God is also with us when we teach the children in our lives right from wrong, when we read to them, and when we pray with them.

God keeps these promises even when we turn away from him when we sin, when we make mistakes, when we doubt our faith. God is faithful to us. God's love for us is so great that he sent his only Son to die on the cross and raised him from the dead three days later so that we will have life.

God promises to walk through life's journey with us. In good times and in not so good times, God is there. He loves us unconditionally and is present when a loved one dies or when we lose a job. He is there when we are sick or suffering in mind, body, or spirit. He's there in the celebration of a promotion, the birth of a child, an anniversary. God is there. God keeps his promises.

In today's gospel, we are also reminded to be alert. When Jesus reminds us to be alert, what does that mean for us? What can we learn from the servants in the gospel reading for today?

The servants that wait on their master were rewarded. They were dressed and ready to serve him when he returned home. They were ready and alert even in the middle of the night.

As Christians we need to be alert and ready. Ready to help others. Ready and alert to hear God speaking to us. Ready and alert to share the good news with others. Ready and alert at the unexpected hour.

How do we remain ready and alert? First, we can pray. We can pray for God's presence and guidance. God promises to be with us, and gives us the advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Second, we should try to be open to caring for others – even if it isn't something we had planned. We could be a friend to someone who needs to see God's love. We could open a door for someone or smile at an individual who looks like they are having a rough day. We might stop and ask a crying person if they are okay. We may perform random acts of kindness such as paying a toll for the car behind us when we travel across the bay bridge. We can speak out against injustice by being advocates for those who aren't being heard.

Third, we should try to be bold in sharing our faith with others. We can share God's love through the gifts that he gives to us by telling others about Jesus, by sharing God's word with those who have never heard it. We can share our faith when we open our homes to our family and friends with a mealtime or bedtime prayer. We might pray with a coworker, friend, or family member who is having a difficult day.

We don't know the hour that the Son of Man is coming. Sometimes it's easy to think that we can put things off until tomorrow. God asks us to be alert and ready. Being alert and ready may also mean taking risks. We may be pushed outside of our comfort zones as disciples when we are alert and ready. We may not want to help the person that we walked by – we might not draw near to someone who needs us. We may not want to do what God calls us to do because we had something different in mind. God calls us to be alert and ready.

No matter where we are in life's journey, God is with us and keeps his promises. We should try to be alert and ready because we don't always know when God calls us to show his love, grace, and mercy to others and we definitely don't know when the Son of Man is coming.

God keeps his promises. Let us try to be disciples that are ready and alert.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.