

Be Like Carson

[Isaiah 1:1, 10-20](#)

[Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24](#)

[Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#)

[Luke 12:32-40](#)

I confess that I'm a Downtown Abbey fan. I got quite caught up in the Crawley's comings and goings, and enjoyed it even more the second time I watched it. I'm really looking forward to the film coming out next month.

Today's gospel reading makes me think of Carson. The lord goes off to a wedding feast (and in those days, weddings took several days and travel was uncertain) so no-one knew for sure when he would return but regardless the servants are ready and watching when he gets back. Rather like when Lord Grantham went to America – nobody knew for sure when he would return. Now of course, he got back during the annual bazaar, not in the middle of the night. But whenever he got back, Carson would have been ready. And if Carson had any idea that a thief was coming he would have been ready, poker in hand, to confront him.

So part of today's reading calls us to be like Carson. Not perhaps in every way, but in his readiness to serve. Be prepared, says Jesus. Be prepared, and of course it's difficult for many of us to hear this story without remembering the servants waiting for the bridegroom with their lamps in hand and a supply of extra oil, or not. But this is a little different and I'm not sure that we should immediately interpret it as talking about the second coming.

The early church was sure that Jesus would return in triumph at any moment. But he didn't. So I wonder whether we might interpret, "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" as something happening here and now. God breaks through into our lives in unexpected ways at unexpected times. We probably won't get a telegram saying that he is coming. He may not even call ahead to order the car to come to the station. She may just arrive in the driveway of our hearts when we are least expecting it.

We never see Lord or Lady Grantham, or indeed any of their daughters, ring the front door bell. As soon as they are on the horizon, the servants are there to greet them, almost as if they have a sixth sense. And perhaps in a way, they do. People who have lived together for a lifetime and have come to know each other's ways often have an unseen connection. I imagine that was much more intense in the days before rapid communication. I suspect that if Lord Grantham were to arrive home unexpectedly in the early hours of the morning, or in the quiet afternoon lull between lunch and tea, Carson would have known.

That is the kind of connection that God calls us to. It is something that has to be worked at, something that needs attention and practice. Carson developed it during his lifetime, living and working with the Crawleys. We develop it through a lifetime of paying attention to the small God moments. Not just the big ones when we say, "That's amazing, there must be a God!" but in the inklings, the moments when we say "I think I should just give Mary a call" and she was needing to hear from us, or in the synchronicities, the apparent coincidences when we make an important but unexpected connection.

Our connection with God is to be consciously nurtured and deepened so that we get to hear God and have God moments even when things are going badly for us. One of the reasons we pray for those who are ill is because it is difficult to pray for yourself when you are hurting. It is much easier to pray when life is good. It is when life is good that we can choose to develop that connection with the Spirit through our intuition, we can hone our skills in hearing God's voice and recognizing God's presence in our lives.

And this takes faith. In the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we heard about the faith that Abraham had when he set out from southern Iraq to go to Palestine. I imagine that Abraham was following an inkling that that was what he was meant to do. His choice to follow the inkling is an example of his faith in God and God's love, and his certainty that the one who called him was faithful.

So let's back up to the beginning of the gospel reading. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." There's a double "little" in the Greek – you could translate it "small little flock". "Do not be afraid, small, little flock." I don't think that Jesus was referring to how few people were listening to him. I think he was addressing them affectionately – "my little ones." "Do not be afraid, little ones, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kin-dom."

And he says that today, to us. Let's take a moment to let that sink in. "Do not be afraid, little ones, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kin-dom."

It is on the basis of that love that we can get rid of our surplus stuff and be generous. When we are fearful we protect ourselves and in the process we often project our fears and see danger where it isn't so we protect ourselves even more. We all have different strategies. Mine tend to include over-eating and playing games on my phone. Other people go shopping. Others surround themselves with things they don't need or houses which are much bigger than they need. Yet others turn to alcohol or drugs.

When we know in our heart of hearts that it is God's good pleasure to give us the kin-dom then we can let our shoulders drop and breath out a big breath of relief. We are ok. We don't have to hold on so tight. We can let go and live our lives in a cycle of generosity rather than a cycle of acquisition. We can as Jesus said, "Sell our possessions, and give alms."

Remember that filial relationship I've been talking about, where Creation's, and therefore our, relationship with the Christ is analogous to the one between Christ and Creator? Since we have a filial relationship with Christ, we can be sure that we are being held. Even greater than our faith, is God's faithfulness to us. And we are hidden, we are held in Christ.

Which is the basis of that surprising twist in the story about the servants. Jesus said, "Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them."

Really?

Lord Grantham gets home and finds Carson and everyone else lined up to greet him so he takes off his coat, puts on an apron and heads for the servants' hall? I don't think so.

The analogy falls down.

God's behavior is surprising. But not so much when you think about the relationship between Son and Father. The persons of the Trinity live together in mutual love, support, obedience and joyful praise. They are always serving one another. It gives them joy to do so. So it is not as surprising that when the Father comes home and finds the Son waiting up that the Father shows his love by serving the meal.

This is the God that we serve, not Lord Grantham. Our God loves us enough to give us pet names. Our God is delighted to give us the kin-dom and is always faithful. Our God is the very meaning of unconditional love.

And our God asks us to watch out for her, and to be ready for those unexpected meetings, those unexpected inklings.

Why would we do anything else?