

Sermon November 30
Bayard Rustin

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Community, hola, buenos días. Let us pray.

Jesus, in your name and in the name of God, *en tu nombre y en el nombre de Dios*, I pray for this community of Chestnut Hill *Oro por esta comunidad reunida en Chestnut Hill*. I pray your loving teachings remain in our hearts as we figure it out the meaning of this life. *Oro para que tus enseñanzas de amor permanezcan en nuestros corazones mientras le encontramos sentido a esta vida*. Thank you for showing us a God that lives in the immediacy of our hearts, *gracias por mostrarnos a un Dios que vive en la inmediatez de nuestros corazones*, in the realm of the everyday, *en el reino de día a día*.

Amen, así sea.

As we read the gospel of Matthew, “about that day and hour no one knows” or “for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming,” it is clear to me that no one knows about that day. “*Nadie sabe el día ni la hora.*” But perhaps this passage invites us to pay attention, not to what Jesus knows, but to the urgency of his message. These verses and the Lesson of the Fig Tree, in the gospel of Matthew, show me a use of references that remind me of the word I want to reflect on for today: **Immediacy**.

Something immediate feels urgent, almost inevitable, right around the corner. And Jesus, through this sense of immediacy, gives us his answer: “Therefore you also must be ready.” And I wonder—ready like who? Ready when? Two thousand years and there are still Christians from other churches waiting for that day to come. I am more a Morning After person. Yeah, like the song. *There’s got to be a morning after*. A “readiness” that imitates Jesus with inner peace.

Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, is always ready. If you read this gospel—spoiler: Jesus knows everything. He even knows about Judas. In this gospel, nothing escapes the narrative, and all is under Jesus’ mission. My professor of Bible told me this had importance for a reader who believed God had control of the story, a reader who could be Jewish and understood Jesus as fulfillment of the scripture.

Community. Being ready feels less and less like anticipating a specific date, and more like, cultivating an everyday posture of immediacy. Let me say it in Spanish.

No necesitamos saber el día ni la hora. Necesitamos estar listos y con el corazón tranquilo, inmediatez.

Remember: in other times, days were more unpredictable. The forecast didn't have satellite precision to announce snow, and many of our ancestors encountered their final days in unexpected natural or human disasters. The earthquake in San Francisco, a war that began with the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and even the Great Molasses Flood back in Boston, when a tank of molasses spilled out over the North End of Boston. One moment and life changed. Just as the flood narrative mentioned by Jesus, those twenty-one victims of the flood molasses, or the millions lost back in two world wars, neither they nor anyone else were ready. Days no one wants to be ready again.

But if we can be ready, does this teaching apply only to war or natural disasters? No, Community. Being ready, at least for me, means to listen. Just like that: to listen to what is immediate. To yourself. No promises. This doesn't guarantee you will know how to react, but it gives you a second to think. While nobody "knows the day or the hour", this Wednesday I will be at this church for movie night. When that day comes, I will keep doing what I have been doing, as Jesus taught me.

Listening to your bodies, to the beat of your heart, because hate and empty promises can twist "that day and hour no one knows". Instead of living in anxious vigilance, with insomnia, four espresso and three red bulls' sugar free. I want to imagine readiness as a grounded, attentive way of being. What if this "day" happens, this day that was mentioned long ago, what if it happens while we make our coffee, or in our sleep, or in the midst of a TV show? I will focus on the morning after, *there's got to be a morning after...*

Immediacy, then, is my invitation today for readiness. In this case, let me share something about a man who listened to the immediacy of his time, who helped to gather, organize, and lead the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. Does it sound familiar? And no, I'm not talking about Rev Martin Luther King.

This march on Washington was one of the largest political rallies for human rights in United States history. Who is he? A Black man, gay, Quaker, and pacifist. Bayard Rustin.

Born in Pennsylvania, he was beaten by the police for doing what Rosa Parks did, years before her. He was arrested for being gay and arrested for his civil disobedience because he did not accept the draft. He was a conscientious objector, and even in prison, he organized against the segregation of housing and dining in this system. He went to India to learn Nonviolence and to Nigeria and Ghana to learn about independent movements. Let me break down his identities: Quaker, gay and Black in the 60s.

Let me start with Quakers. Known as the Society of Friends, they are Christians who don't have creeds and avoid hierarchy. Many times, their services are held in silence, with no one speaking unless the spirit moves them. They do not ordain; they record ministers who have a gift for speaking, chaplaincy, and leadership. Bayard Rustin learned Quakerism from his grandmother Julia Rustin, as he also attended the AME or African Methodist Episcopal church. He learned from both traditions of shout and silence about being in community, listening to God's voice together.

But he was Quaker and Black in a society that was segregated, a society that naturalized this division with violence. He lived in Harlem and joined the Communist Party, which gave him a bad reputation throughout the rest of his career. A stigma—just like being Black or gay—based on assumptions. He was a pacifist, and he believed in the potential of churches to speak back to power. He believed in collaborative work with white folks rather than their exclusion from race conversations. He opposed Slavery reparations, Black Studies in academia, or even a Black History Month. He was a socialist who would have been uncomfortable for liberals and progressives today, but he was with the workers and listened in order to organize this march. We don't have to agree with him, but he tried to listen to his immediacy and acted moved by his little light of his.

Bayard Rustin was trained by the nonviolence of Gandhi, a pacifism he taught to Dr. King during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. His gay experience led him to prison in California for being in a car with another man in a suspicious spot. His work with Rev. Martin Luther King gained him some enemies, and his detractors, together with the The FBI, created the rumor that he and Bayard Rustin had something. They used his sexuality as a gay man in the 1960s as a weapon to push him out of the movement. Still, the March on Washington—where we hear the famous speech “I Have a Dream”—is a testament to Rustin's ability to listen deeply and return to the needs of his moment. To respond with courage for a day and hour no one knows, but we all share.

For those who want to see him in action, there is a movie, *Bayard*. It is still on Netflix. And being gay, or Black, or Quaker shouldn't be the way someone is more interesting or not. He was able to listen, and in the immediacy of his time, he followed Jesus' teachings.

My favorite quote says:

“My activism did not spring from my being gay, or for that matter, from my being black. Rather it is rooted, fundamentally, in my Quaker upbringing and the values that were instilled in me by my grandparents who reared me. Those values are based on the concept of a single human family. And the belief that all members of that family are equal. Adhering to those values has meant making a stand against injustice, to the best of my ability, whenever and wherever it occurs.”

For a day and hour no one knows Jesus wants to say “be ready.” And I will share with you my desire: Listen to your immediacy. Listen to your neighbor instead of waiting for messianic fulfillments and scary prophecies for another two thousand years. Listen to the figure of Jesus, our teacher, to be ready to listen to the voice of God. In the silence of your most intimate prayer, in your heart, ask to be ready.

Today, God is also inviting us to organize a march, one bigger than the one we had back in the sixties, an inner march, an inner movement within our bodies, a readiness that comes out of listening to the beat of our hearts. Learn from Bayard Rustin. Your identities are not obstacles to be ready but opportunities to be yourself. We may not be called to organize another march in Washington, but we are called to organize our own interior lives, cultivate silence, and become the instrument of a peace that nothing can disturb. That any day or hour has a morning after.

To be ready today, to follow Jesus, to listen, to let your innermost authentic self emerge in silence, to listen to the immediate voice of God. And we are ready.

So don't ask me when is the day and hour that no one knows. Let us do good on this earth every day and every hour, because we are alive.

I want to invite you to pray repeating after me:

God,
I am alive today
in this day and hour

I know I love you

And that is enough to start today.

I am ready.

Amen.