

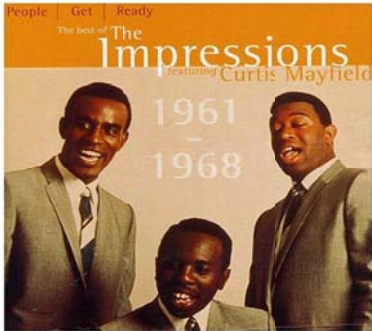
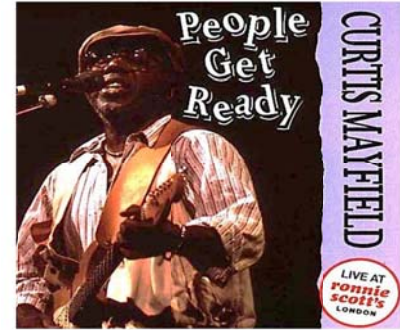
## “People Get Ready”

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Mark 13:24-37 = living ready

Curtis Mayfield came from a long line of church folk. His grandmother was an itinerate preacher. Like Johnny Cash and others, Mayfield started out writing and singing in the Gospel genre. He wrote that well known popular song “*People Get Ready*” originally as a Gospel song.



The Impressions were quite taken with “*People Get Ready.*” They wanted to record it. Nevertheless they requested a change in a couple of lines to make it secular. “God gave me my strength” in the original became “I’ve got my strength.” and the rest, as they say, is history.

The song became a crossover hit propelling the Impressions and Curtis Mayfield beyond Gospel, beyond Motown to popular stardom and a broad audience. It begins with evident anticipation:

*People get ready, there’s a train a-coming*

*You don’t need no baggage –*

*you just get on board.*

*All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin’*

*You don’t need no ticket you just thank the lord*

“*People get ready*” is good counsel. “*People live ready*” also happens to be Jesus’ counsel for us today. In our passage, Jesus speaks in the imperative voice:

- “*beware.*” ~ repeated 15 times in Mark, 5 times in chapter 13 alone.
- “*keep awake.*” ~ repeated 6 times in Mark, 3 times in this chapter alone.
- “*keep alert.*” Only once in all of Mark, and where? You guessed it. In our text today.



Jesus is at pains to counsel us, cajole us, command us: live ready, ever prepared ~ always *alert*. These words are not just for First Century Galileans and Judeans. Jesus definitely intends them for us as well. These are words for just such troubled times as those in which we live today.

**T**here are abundant signs we have the same longings as the Judeans of the First Century. For our time, domestic violence, gun injuries and deaths, mass shootings have all been accelerating. Injustice abounds. Name calling and disinformation have become the norm in campaigns descending into a sewer pit of disrespectful incivility. For many in our world, ideology replaces faith. A genuine respect for nation has devolved into idolatry.

Just like the peoples of Jesus' day, we long for, thirst for God's true society, God's true polity, God's true justice to become real among us. We long for release. We strain to see signs of redemption and for wrong to be righted. We are no different, not a feather's-weight difference between our and their longing for the anointed one of God to come.

**B**ut for all our longing, does impatience get the better of us? Red Owl, a Native American storyteller speaks of the wisdom of his grandmother, who offers this insight about impatience:

"We native Americans have a great advantage over whites. It is very easy to bargain with them, for they think time is important."



The same is true an ocean away in a Javanese traditional market, where there are no fixed prices. Haggling over price is an important social activity. Ex-pats from Western cultures are never able to get as low a price by bargaining as our Indonesian colleagues would.

My Indonesian friends finally let me know why ~ it is on account of, like the native American wise woman says, folks from Westerns cultures tend to think time, our time, is important. We are too impatient to do a simple activity like marketing. We want to get it done and over with as quickly as possible.

**T**o bargain well one has to let go of the idea that the transaction is the purpose of the transaction. We must learn to think beyond



utilitarian value ~ to instead think of everything, time included, in a different way, in Jesus' way.

In our faith we need to learn patience by entering a timeless realm, God's realm, where our time and the other persons' time, all time is rendered into an art ~ the art of relationship-building ~ the art of distilling God's time out of chronological time. Everything then becomes an oasis out of time where relationships are of infinitely greater value than the time spent cultivating them.

**T**o wait well for God's reign and Jesus' return you have to let go of time and think instead of relationship. We have to enter God's timeless realm, where past and future and present are all wound together ~ where there is nothing but our relationship with God and one another.



A timeless realm where what was ~ Jesus' life, death and resurrection ~ and what will be ~ Jesus' return in compassion, power and justice ~ are not distant murmurs but fully engaged in the present, informing our lives right now.

Yes, we impatient Christians think time, our time is important. But time, God's time, renders our counting time, our making time, renders our keeping time, our passing time ~ renders it all unimportant.

**W**hen it comes to opportunities to work for God's reign, there is nothing like the present. Keeping alert as Jesus commands emphatically does not mean waiting passively for God. Rather, we are partners with God.

It's like surfing. We may ride a wave, but we cannot make a wave. Our job is to patiently wait for the waves God creates ~ and to be ready to catch them when they come in God's time. The odd thing is that that the best waves, the best opportunities for God's reign are during the greatest storms.'



Surfing in a great storm gives us hope in the present age, in these between times. Times such as these which make for mass shootings, for police killings of unarmed young men ~ times such as polarized politics and



broken governance, such as institutionalized bigotry, such as ever widening gaps between rich and poor, such as disappearing social mobility, times such as seemingly unending wars. These are indeed storms making for giant waves.

And yet, these are also times of the greatest opportunity for advancing God's realm ~ if we would not react with impatient cynicism and violence, but instead respond in Jesus' way, of righteous means put to righteous ends. Jesus' whole life and teachings were to follow in these stormy times the path of *non-violent resistance* ~ resisting evil, but not using the tools of evil ~ the path of protesting in shopping malls; and the path of working to right a seriously broken system of justice especially for refugees, immigrants, minorities and the poor.



Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi both followed to success Jesus' path of non-violent resistance. They both knew if their movements gave into the easy path of violence they would fail. They knew it was about patiently building relationships and allies rather than destroying them.

**W**ithin all the ebb and flow of life "*People be ready*" is good advice for all times: "*Be aware. Keep awake. Keep alert.*"



Live always in the timeless realm, that community of God where past, present and future are all woven together. Where relationships are of utmost importance, our relationship with God and our relationship with neighbor and friend, enemy and sojourner, stranger and the least of these, all are important.

"*People be ready*" for stormy times and every opportunity to advance God's community. Stormy waves, they can harm us ~ dash us against the rocks ~ but if we are ready, aware, awake, alert ~ if we take Jesus at his word and wait with patience, humility of spirit and deep conviction, we can ride those waves over the rocks into God's realm.



To rework Curtis Mayfield's tune with Jesus' words today, preserving their profound expectation:

*People **be** ready, there's a **storm** a-coming  
You don't **have to** worry  
~ just **ride with the Lord**.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren in the introduction of *The Purpose Driven Church*