

## Weekly Devotional Guide

*Our study this week focuses on the need for us to be prepared to meet Jesus anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Like the sign along the road that warns: "Get Right with God," scripture reminds us that we are to be ready at all times.*

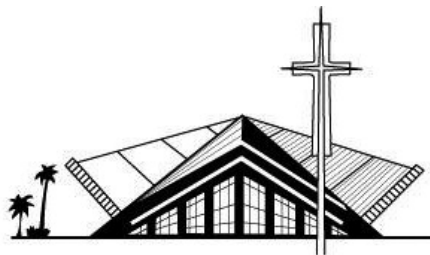
**Monday:** God comes to us often when we least expect the visit, and gives us news that we may hardly be prepared to grasp. Imagine how Abraham and Sarah felt as Abraham was told that his 90-year-old wife would bear a son (Genesis 17.15-17). Or how Mary, engaged to Joseph, felt as Gabriel announced to her that she would give birth to Jesus (Luke 1.26-30)? How prepared do you think each was to take on the new life that God called them to? How might you have responded?

**Tuesday:** What about Peter, Andrew, James and John as they went about their business of commercial fishing (Matthew 4.18-22)? How does their ready response to Jesus' invitation to quit and follow him indicate their level of preparedness? What does that tell you about these men? If Jesus came to you at work and invited you to do likewise, how would you respond?

**Wednesday:** Jesus' parable in Matthew 25.1-13 about the ten bridesmaids and their readiness to meet the bridegroom presented a challenge that five met easily. Their oil lamps were full and burning; the others had to go shopping. In the midst of hurricane season, we might easily relate to the need to have supplies on hand to avoid the last minute rush in the face of an approaching storm. But God is ever-present and will drop in on us without advanced notice! How full is the lamp of your spirit with God oil?

**Thursday:** In Matthew 26.36-41 we read that even Peter, James and John had difficulty staying alert for Jesus in his time of great need—and they were his closest disciples! How willing is your spirit and how weak is your flesh to be faithful?

**Friday:** As you read Matthew 5.23-24, notice that Jesus is teaching that even if you are at the altar of God when you remember that you have an issue with someone else, you clearly aren't ready to be there until you resolve your issue with that person. Examine your relationships with others. What issues might you have that you need to resolve before they get in the way of your relationship with Jesus?



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## Lessons from Luke: Get Dressed

Sunday, August 8, 2010

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor  
Scripture Lesson: Luke 12:35-40

I know school is starting back in a couple of weeks. Kids, I'm sorry to bring it up. I know many of you are dreading it. But I also know that many parents are counting down the days!

When I was a kid I always dreaded the time when summer was ending and school was about to start. No more lazy days swimming, playing with friends, and participating in sports all day. No, it was time to go to the drug store, pick out school supplies and get ready for your new teachers.

I remember getting the skinny on my new teachers from those kids who had them the previous year. Sometimes they would say nice things about them. But most often they treated it like a rite of passage, "Oh, you have so and so! I hope you like homework. I was up until 3am every night doing homework. She is mean. Don't misbehave. She sent half of us home crying every day. There was weeping and gnashing of teeth." Well, it never turned out as they said. Early on I learned that some folks are prone to exaggeration.

Most of my teachers were wonderful. I remember all of them. I remember my 5th grade math teacher, Mrs. Kitchel. I promise she had eyes in the back of her head. And if you didn't do your homework you prayed she wouldn't call on you. Because if she did and you didn't do it, she would

say, "Oh Dear. I think we are going to have to call mother!" And she would. She would take you to the principal's office and call your mom right then and there. A fate worse than death!

I remember when she would do this and she left the class with the poor kid. She would say, "Now, ya'll stay in your seats and work on that problem on the board. I can hear you down the hall. So you better not make a noise." And she would leave. Well, I wish I could say that we stayed in our seats but we didn't. We would throw erasers around the room, turn on the radio, and have a little party. But we had a lookout. And whenever our lookout saw her coming down the hall, he would say, "Shhhh. Get back in your seats. She's coming. Quick! Look Busy!"

Well, whenever I read our text for today I think of being in Mrs. Kitchel's class. The text is clear. Be ready. Jesus could come at any moment. Be watching and waiting. Stay alert. Look busy! He is going to come when you least expect him. Blessed are you if when he comes you are in your seats doing your work, but woe be unto you if you are out of your seats goofing off when he comes.

This warning in Luke about Jesus' second coming is a bit off putting. I can see where it would make some folks feel a little uneasy.

Well, if you are where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing, blessed are you. And, if you are not, well, Jesus says, have you ever been robbed? Shocked. Stunned. Disrupted. It will be just like that. Unexpected. You won't know what hit you. Out of nowhere. Make sure you are alert.

Melodramatic preachers and churches have taken advantage of texts like these over the years. I remember going to a church on Halloween. They had a haunted house with a message. One part of it was sitting in a chapel with a bunch of others. They acted like it was a worship service. Then there was a bang. The lights were turned off. A blood curdling scream. Then the lights turned back on and there was just you and two or three others left. There were red lights and sirens going off. Then a deep voice from a loud speaker announced, "Like a thief in the night I'm coming. My followers have been raptured up. The disobedient are left on the earth to die... This is what the second coming of Jesus will be like. Be ready. Get right with God." Well, their presentation didn't exactly follow what the Bible says about the second coming. But they sure got the unexpected part right! I have never been a big fan of this kind of tactic. I have never been a big fan of scaring people into heaven. It is wrong on so many levels.

I had a friend in college who was as pure as the driven snow. Never did anything wrong. Just went to class then went back to his room. Read his Bible twice a day. Never went out to movies or to parties. He was convinced that Jesus was coming back any moment. When asked why he didn't go out, he would say, "When he comes back I want to be ready and alert. My worst fear is that when Jesus comes back I will be doing something I shouldn't be doing. You know, he said he is coming when you least expect him." He was right. Jesus said it in our text. It couldn't be any clearer. "Be ready. I'm coming when you least expect me." But when Jesus said this he didn't intend for his followers to be joyless until he returned. But some people can't help but be anxious about it.

In one of Peter DeVries' novels there is a character named Stan Waltz. He is married to a woman who belongs to a fundamentalist church. One night they were awakened by a deafening explosion of a fireworks factory in the town. Waltz's wife convinces him that it is the second coming of Christ. So he hastily baptizes himself under the

cold water faucet in the kitchen, just in case.

I guess the anxiety of Jesus coming unexpectedly is what drives some people to treat it like a solvable math equation. They have to know. They see the Bible as having a secret code to decipher. And they misuse the Bible and put this passage and that passage together. They create time lines and dates. They sell books with dramatic titles and make movies about the end of the world. Many over the years have claimed they know. They set the date. The date comes and goes and many are left with lighter wallets and purses because they bought into the hype.

The hype continues even though Jesus said it would be unexpected. The hype continues even though Jesus said, "No person knows the hour." But the hype and the desire to know will always be with us until Jesus returns because it will always be hard for some to accept the surprise of all of it, the unexpected nature of all of it.

If we are honest, we feel that the passage today does beg the question: Why does it have to be such a surprise? Why does it have to be so unexpected? Why can't we be given fair warning? It seems like the merciful thing to do. Is God playing some kind of trick? Is God trying to trap us? That does not seem very loving. That does not seem very gracious. That does not seem like the God I know.

Well, the popular preacher response is, "Well, if you knew when you would live, you would do whatever you wanted to do and then slide in at the last minute. If I told you Christ was coming back at noon tomorrow, you would live it up, party all night, engage in all kind of sin and debauchery, get it out of your system and then show up 5 minutes before noon, slide right into your sit and say, 'Okay, ready to go. I didn't miss anything, did I?'" Well, maybe you would do that, but maybe not.

I tend to think of it in another way. The coming of Christ is unexpected because we have never been very good at predicting and anticipating how God operates. Heck, most people didn't recognize Jesus the first time he came. What makes us think we will anticipate his return? I mean, what do you think would have happened if God had gathered all the best advertisers, PR gurus and campaign managers and said, "Okay. I am planning my entrance into the world. I am planning to show the world who I am? What do you think of this? I begin as a baby born from the

womb of a teenaged peasant girl. I spend my first days in a feeding trough. I grow up poor. When I grow up my first sermon is so offensive that almost get thrown off a cliff by my hometown. Then I gather the worst group of rag tag disciples. I hang out with outcasts, drunks and prostitutes. I challenge the status quo, get arrested, get tortured and killed. What do you think?"

Let's face it. Most of us would not have recognized God in Jesus if we would have lived when he walked the earth. Don't feel bad. Most people didn't recognize him as God either. The religious leaders who were looking and praying for Messiah yelled, "Crucify him!" The political authorities saw him as a nuisance and washed their hands of him. The masses saw him as a great orator who performed a few magic tricks, but tired of him when he kept speaking the truth. Heck, even the disciples fell asleep when he was about to be betrayed and later his followers turned their back on him. Ironically, in Mark it was a Roman Centurion, who played a part in Jesus' execution, who looked up at Jesus as he was dying and said, "Truly this was the Son of God." How come no one else noticed?

It didn't get much better when Jesus was resurrected and his Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost. A little over hundred gathered, the wind blew, they all began to speak in foreign languages. But nobody else noticed it was God, at least not until Peter explained what was going on. In fact, when the religious authorities heard all the commotion, they thought it was a frat party and made fun of them. "They have had too much Budweiser." Peter said, "No, it is only nine in the morning." And then he began to preach. And some believed. But you know, there were others who didn't.

We are not very good at anticipating how God is going to show up. We are not very good at expecting God. In fact, for those who are not ready or prepared, it is downright disruptive when God shows up. Jesus said it in our text. If you are not ready, my coming will be like someone ransacked your house when you were gone and took everything. It is disruptive, upsetting. It can be. That twinge of conscience when it is inconvenient. That frustration when the church is asking for money again. The need to forgive when all you want to do is get even. The call to do something, to serve, that keeps nagging at you and won't leave you alone. Somebody in need, needs

help. "Leave my house alone! Leave me to myself. Stop disrupting my life!"

You see, so many of us want to experience God, follow God. But we feel disrupted when he shows up. We are not prepared when he shows up. We haven't swept our souls, cleaned up our hearts, taken out the trash, thrown away our distractions, so his coming feels like an invasion. We want God, but are we prepared for God? The truth that often hurts is that so often we want God on our own terms.

But isn't it interesting the picture Jesus gives us of those who are prepared, ready, watching for Jesus. He says they are those who can't wait for the master to arrive, so they can open the door and show that the house is clean, take his things, serve him, prop up his feet, getting him some dinner, hear all about his trip. For those who are ready, when God shows up it is not a disruption; it is a wonderful surprise.

When God shows up in your life, is it a disruption or a wonderful surprise? How will it be when Christ comes in glory?

Once upon a time there was a church. A very successful church, an affluent church. They had all the bells and whistles. They seemed to be doing everything right. Sunday morning came. They gathered in the sanctuary. A visitor showed up. It looked like he had slept on the street. His hair was matted down. He didn't smell very good. His clothes were old and torn. He looked out of place. He made his way down the aisle and sat in a pew. Some in the pew moved away from him and others got up and found a seat somewhere else. But there was one lady who stayed. In fact, she got up and sat right next to him. He turned and looked at her and she looked at him. He said, "I recognize you, you know." She said, "You do?" He replied, "Yes, don't you recognize me? The lady looked puzzled. He said, "Remember that time I was a stranger, and you welcomed me? You remember that time I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. Remember that time I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. Remember that time when I was naked and you clothed me. Remember that time I was in prison and you visited me. Remember that time I was sick and you took care of me?" She replied, "Yes! I do remember! I've been expecting you, Lord!"

"You must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Amen.