

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Ready or Not?

Luke 12:35-40

Sunday, August 7, 2022

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Well, tomorrow will be a big day for the Reeb household. Paul starts Kindergarten at Wilson Creek Elementary! Pray for us. I don't if our heart can take watching Paul get on the bus in the morning.

It is been an exciting and stressful time for many families who face the new school year. When I was a kid I always dreaded the time when summer ended and school started. No more lazy days swimming, playing with friends, and running around a tennis court 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 hearing the gossip about 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 leave 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. If you are where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing, blessed are you. But 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. Trying to scare people into heaven is wrong on so many levels.

I had a friend in college who was a 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.”

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.

So 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 way I see it, the coming of Christ is unexpected, not because God gets some kind of pleasure from tricking us, but 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 hang out with outcasts and drunk and insult the religious establishment. Finally, I get arrested, tortured and killed. What do you think?”

Let’s face it. Most of us would not have recognized Christ. We would have been unprepared for his entrance into the world. God’s plan for overcoming evil, sin and death would’ve never appeared on our radar. Don’t feel bad. Most people who lived when Jesus walked the earth 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. 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. There were others who didn’t recognize or expect God to be in all that chaos and noise.

We are not very good at anticipating how God is going to show up. We are not very good at expecting God and God does not expect us to be. The unpredictability of God reminds us that God is God and we are not.

What Jesus keeps saying over and over, is just be ready for it. Don’t miss it!

I remember teaching on this text and someone said, “Well, Charley, when Jesus comes back won’t it be

obvious? I think we will know. Just like we know when a hurricane is about to hit us, we will know. Why all this talk like we are going to miss it?"

We always associate this text with the second coming of Jesus, but such a dramatic association can cause us to miss a more poignant message in this text. You see, I have always believed that this text is not just Jesus giving us a warning about his second coming: Jesus is trying to tell us not to miss him when he shows up in our life today.

I remember having a conversation with an older man sitting next to me on a plane. He asked what I did for a living. When I told him I was a preacher, his face sunk. "I believe I was supposed to be a preacher" he replied. "Oh really? What happened?" I asked. He mentioned having the desire to attend seminary after college but other things always got in the way. "I stayed home to invest in a toxic relationship. I kept a job that was easy and paid well. I also spent a bunch of money on trips trying to relive my college days."

He paused a moment to reflect and then concluded, "I didn't realize it at the time, but when I look back it's clear that God was trying to get my attention. I guess I was too preoccupied with life. I am sad when I think about it. I wonder what else I've missed."

Jesus said, **"You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."**

Jesus rarely shows up in a way we expect. That's why he tells us to watch, to be ready. It never looks like we think it is going to look. It never happens the way we think it is going to happen.

Have you ever missed God? Have you ever missed an opportunity from God?

Many years ago, Mother Teresa met with Dr. Robert Schuller, the pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in California. Dr. Schuller was in awe of Mother Teresa's ministries to the poor in Calcutta, India. She had devoted her life to serving the neediest, most destitute people in Calcutta, and has been instrumental in starting similar ministries around the world. Dr. Schuller asked Mother Teresa for some words of wisdom for his ministry. He was so moved by what she said that he had her words engraved into a plaque which he hung on his office wall.

Mother Teresa told Dr. Schuller, "Be all and only for Jesus. Let Him use you without consulting you first."

"Be all and only for Jesus. Let Him use you without

consulting you first." That's what it means to be dressed ready for service. And that's why Jesus shows up unexpectedly. He doesn't want to have to consult with us first. Why should he?

What would have to change in your life for you to be ready for service? What fears would you have to overcome? What priorities would you have to change? And what could God do through you if you let God use you without consulting you first?

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.

You never know when Jesus will show up in your life and want to use you. You never know, so be ready, be watching, be dressed.

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! That was you, Lord?"

"You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097
770-497-8215 www.johnscreekumc.org