

One thing I remember from Boy Scouts was the motto, “be prepared!” And in every area of life it makes sense to be ready for whatever comes next. That is why we want our children to get an education, learn good manners, learn about Jesus’ love, and find hobbies and activities that help them to relax and share time with others. In so many ways we are always trying to be prepared. But that isn’t always enough.

Levees and pumping stations surrounded New Orleans, but a devastating storm made such planning worthless. Vaccinations and healthy diets are embraced by most, yet what happened when we were devastated by a virus no one had ever heard about. Soon after that, we were caught off guard by protests and marches after a tragic and senseless death in Minneapolis. We always think we have taken measures to prepare for any eventuality.

And yet who can truly prepare for every random act of violence or act of nature? We live in a broken world, infected with sin, and much as we hate to admit it, one day each of us will die. So what are we supposed to do?

Should we simply throw our hands up in despair or quite preparing altogether? Maybe huddle in corners and hope nothing bad happens or do we purchase every safeguard and pass every law we can to surround ourselves with protection? And how do we prepare when we aren’t even sure where the next danger will lurk, or what demented or tormented life will emerge from the shadows?

As we near the end of the church year, our readings deal with the end of time. And many have lived this year with fears about issues beyond their control. Who do you know who is so fearful or anxious or nervous they have forgotten how to be fully alive? Who do you know who is so self-absorbed, and grabbing every moment of life, that they have forgotten this life is will not last forever.

The reality is that Christ WILL come again, just as He comes to us each and every day. Whether he comes to take you home or to stand with you today – he asks, “How are you getting ready? Are you preparing or are you wasting energy, time, and talent?”

How tragic if Jesus knocked on a door to announce, “I’ve come to bring you home,” only to find no one was there! How sad if Christ would enter a room full of people he created in love, whose only passion in life had been in surrounding themselves with valuable objects and distractions that will not last.

That is why Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonica. He begged them to be serious about their faith and getting ready for the coming of Christ into their lives. Whether it is for the end of time, or Christ’s daily presence in our lives, how can we best prepare? How can we go become Children of the Light and not people overwhelmed by the dark?

Today's lessons shout "*Be prepared! Don't be caught by surprise. Be faithful to your calling and active in your faith!*" How will we live as children of light, if our eyes are closed and we walk as if we are asleep? How faithful are we with our God given talents, and how aware of the opportunities God places in our path?

Spring training prepares baseball players for a long season. Summer camps do the same for football players. Unless an athlete is in shape *before* games are played, they risk injuries. Elementary school gets us ready for high school, college for our adult years, and our adult years help us prepare the next generation to repeat the cycle.

If we miss steps along the way, we will not achieve our capable potential. One might have the greatest recipes of all, but if your pantry isn't stocked you'll never put to use your culinary skills. So it is with faith. It is more than memorizing Bible passages or commandments, but rather in practicing every moment through Bible study, prayer, and servant love that we learn to prepare.

Even Jesus had to pray in the garden before his arrest and death – He knew to get ready! That is what Paul meant when he said, "whether we live or we die, whether we are awake or asleep, we are gifted to live with Him." And when we live with him, the darkness will never return and the light will never grow dim!

I spent 15 years as a pastor before I had to face death in my own family. And when I did, even though I thought I had faith, I wasn't ready. It was too soon. It didn't make sense. My wife was too young. It wasn't fair. I was at a loss. I had spent so much time helping others deal with grief and loss, I discovered I wasn't ready for mine.

It was during my recovery that I finally grasped why Easter is the most important event in my life of faith. The only reason the Church exists is to help each other receive Christ daily in our own lives. From that moment, my preparations took on a new perspective. And when preparations change, how we live does as well.

Jesus told a story about a manager who went on a long journey and gave money to each of his workers to take care of business. When he returned, two had spent everything on the business and one had hidden the money for fear of doing something stupid. The master fired the fearful, faithless, lazy worker – he had failed to prepare!

It is how we use God's gifts that proclaims the power of our faith, and the brightness of our vision. As we understand that all we have is on loan to us from God (and a gift to be used in his service) then we are on the path to keeping our eyes open. Christ will come again and, in the scheme of things, it will be soon. Whether this week or 50 years from now, that will be soon enough, and our call as God's people is to make certain that we are ready, so we aren't caught off guard or by surprise.

My first wife planned a surprise party for my 40th birthday. Two days before the party we found out she had incurable cancer. She went ahead with the party, which was a major surprise and loving success. But it was a different party for us than our guests, because none of them knew yet what we knew. They playfully joked about getting old and dying, while we were living with that reality more than any of our friends knew. They joked about such preparations while we were already in the midst of doing so.

In hindsight, that has become a parable for me just like this story from Matthew's Gospel. No one knows when the Master will return, and yet he always does, day after day after day. A young mother understood that and in the midst of dying she celebrated life – that is what it means to be a child of the Light.

That is how the love of Jesus Christ and the power of Easter become real in real lives. That is the point of Paul's words of encouragement and Jesus' story about servants who were to keep busy while their master was away.

Are you prepared? There is no reason not to be. God has given everything we need. Our only question is what we do in response. Will we live with eyes wide open, or walk around as if you are overwhelmed with the darkness of sleep.

May God bless you with the Light of Easter's love and help you to prepare his way, in all that you do and all that you are. God will be with you, every step of the way!

-- Seeber