

“Be Ready!”

Danielle Shroyer shared this experience, “When I was a teenager, I saw this video from the 1970’s that depicted the ‘rapture.’ It had all of these nice looking people being neighborly and mowing their lawns and cooking in their kitchens until POOF! — all of a sudden, in a flash (and with terrible film editing) one of them was gone. The camera cut to an oven still on, untended, and then to a lawn mower lurching eerily down the lawn without anyone to steer it.” Shroyer continued, **“This week’s lectionary text is the Scripture passage the video tossed up on the screen at the end, like a literal slam dunk for their point.”**

Shroyer explained further, “This was, I believe, supposed to scare us into being Christians. (Never mind that Jesus wasn’t really into fear-mongering or creepy propaganda. Actual fear sometimes happened in the gospels, but not fear with intent to persuade, like a bad car salesman. But I digress...)”

Shroyer put forth her point, “Here’s the problem: I think we’ve been reading this whole thing backwards. ... We tend to read this as if the ‘saved’ are the ones who are taken away, and the others are left behind. But that’s not what the text points to at all.”

Among the examples of Jesus’ teachings, which Shroyer used to challenge society’s common beliefs about the ‘Left Behind promise’ is the last illustration Jesus shared in today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading. Shroyer wrote, “Likewise, in the metaphor of the thief, the thief comes and takes someone away. It’s a kidnapping story, not a Peter Pan-whisking-you-away-to-Neverland story. The hope for those who are ready is that their doors are locked and they stay put, right where they are.”

Continuing her argument Shroyer said, “If you aren’t yet convinced, keep reading into chapter 25, where we get to the story of the bridesmaids. Again, the ones who weren’t prepared were gone when the bridegroom came. They were gone, and they missed him. The bridesmaids who stayed put were there to greet the bridegroom with lamps burning brightly.”

The final example from Scripture, which Shroyer raised was, **“The entire Book of Revelation describes Jesus coming to live with us forever, here on Earth. ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them’ (Revelation 21:3).”**

Shroyer concluded, **“So ... can we stop all of this Left Behind nonsense already?”** (“Let’s All Get Left Behind – Where do you think you’re going?” for the November 25, 2013 The Hardest Question by Danielle Shroyer on thq.wearesparkhouse.org)

I’ve shared Danielle Shroyer’s insights because I haven’t found someone else making the same arguments and because, for the most part, I agree with what she said. Additionally, as I have said on previous occasions, the first verse of this Scripture is really about the issue of when the Kingdom of God would be Fully Revealed – when Jesus Christ would make his Second Coming. And, finally, this Text is in conflict with the claims in the synoptic gospels that Jesus promised some of his followers during his public ministry would still be alive when he Returned to Usher in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God. **In my previous messages on this subject, I shared my belief the sources for the New Testament gospels incorrectly thought Jesus was talking about his Second Coming when, in actuality, he was describing some of his followers being alive to see the Kingdom of God break into human history in a powerful way – such as, during the Transfiguration Event, which took place a week after Jesus made the reference.**

This First Sunday of Advent, as we prepare to Celebrate the First Coming of Jesus on that first Christmas, as the Christ Child, we are focusing on Jesus’ teaching about how we need to always be ready to welcome his Return because it could happen at any time – no one but God knows when! We will get back to what it means to “Be Ready” but, first, it is valuable to recognize Jesus’ teaching in this Reading provided numerous illustrations of the sudden and unexpected nature of Jesus’ Second Coming and the value of being prepared for it. It is good to keep in mind Danielle Shroyer’s revelation that Jesus was not teaching his believers would be taken up into heaven just prior to his Second Coming. Unfortunately, the common popular misunderstanding is all of the

illustrations in today's Scripture were about the rapture. **Instead, Jesus was warning his followers to "Be Ready" everyday – all the time because the coming of the Kingdom of God will not be controlled by us or anyone else – only by our Divine Parent!**

Among the illustrations, Jesus taught about, was what happened to the people outside the Ark during the Time of Noah. He also spoke of how the people in the field or the mill, who were not expecting a big change, would miss something crucial to them, as it is about to occur. Jesus spoke about how, if one knew in advance, when a break in would happen, the home owner would be awake and ready to stop the thief. All of those examples illustrated the value of being ready, when something important is about to take place. What will be the most important moment in the future? Jesus identified it will be when he Returns to Usher in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God! The Scripture began in **verse 36, "No one knows, however, when that day and hour will come — neither the angels in heaven nor the Son; the Father alone knows.** Only God is truly in charge! You and I and everyone else are incapable of knowing the exact time with Jesus will Return to Usher in the Kingdom of God. Claiming otherwise, only makes one a fraud and a con artist. There have been many of them throughout history. If we think we can be in charge of such a thing, then we will surely fail in spectacular fashion!

An example is, "Martin, the Cobbler, in Leo Tolstoy's story about a lonely shoemaker who is promised in a dream that Christ will come to visit his shop. The next day Martin rises early, gets his shop ready, prepares a meal and waits. The only one who showed up in the morning was an old beggar who came by and asked for rest. Martin gave him a room he had prepared for his divine guest. The only one to show up in the afternoon was an old lady with a heavy load of wood. She was hungry and asks for food. He gave her the food he had prepared for his divine guest. As evening came, a lost boy wandered by. Martin took him home, afraid all the while he would miss the Christ. That night in his prayers he asks the Lord, 'Where were You? I waited all day for You.'"

"The Lord said to Martin:

'Three times I came to your friendly door,

Three times my shadow was on your floor.

I was a beggar with bruised feet.

I was the woman you gave to eat.

I was the homeless child on the street." (J. Howard Olds, adapted from Leo Tolstoy's Where Love Is, God Is, Faith Breaks, www.Sermons.com)

The Kingdom of God is constantly breaking in – we don't have to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus to experience it coming into our lives with power. Like Martin, the Cobbler, the Kingdom – God is present when we are agape loving the beggar, the hungry woman, the homeless child – indeed, when you and I show welcome, hospitality, agape love, and minister to anyone and everyone! When is the best day and time to begin living out this New Life in Christ? Jesus answered in **verse 44, "So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him."** Yes, Jesus' answer is **"always be ready"**! Now is the time to live out the New Faith Relationship with God, one another, and all people!

We have some good ways readily available to all of us during this Advent. Our CCA Giving Tree is a great way to help families and their children to have a better Christmas. Donating to the CCA Christmas Basket Program is a good way to help folks in need have a delicious Christmas meal. In the coming days, perhaps months, you may find yourself with a coworker or neighbor or family member or loved one or friend or even an acquaintance, who needs to experience God's and Christ's agape self-giving, suffering, and sacrificial love. **You may even find yourself becoming God's agent of Welcome and Invitation to someone, who needs to receive Forgiveness, Healing, Meaning, Purpose, and New Life in the New Faith Relationship with God. Indeed, he or she may experience such a wonderful transformation!** Be Ready! Look for and follow through when opportunities come to agape love. Amen.