

Whenever we hear Jesus in the gospel tell parables of being ready or being surprised by a sudden arrival, the first thought that comes to our mind is: yes, death will come, it will come suddenly, and most will be caught unaware. And so, the reaction is fear and trembling; since death can come anytime to anyone, we must always be prepared. That we should always be prepared and ready is correct. But that death is coming is not very correct.

Why should we be ready? What are we preparing for? The Master, says Jesus, suddenly arrives and finds servants who are up and about, ready to do what was expected of them. You know what the Master is going to do? The Master will tell the servants to sit down at table, have a good time, and he will himself be their waiter! That is because in his assessment, here are guys who are up to his expectations and are reliable; these servants are alert and always ready to answer the call of duty! Notice that the passage starts on a very happy note of assurance: Do not be afraid any longer. The Father has decided to make you happy; he will give you a surprise gift lovely beyond your imagination. The surprise gift will be the kingdom. The Kingdom will be so beautiful and fascinating that you will set your heart on having it; you will really treasure the Father's lovely gift! There's nothing about dying or dying suddenly. On the contrary, we are told that when he would surely arrive, but the time of his arrival is not known, he would give a big party and he will do the serving himself! Is that something fearful and terrifying? I guess it's the most wonderful thing to could happen! The image used by Jesus, the thief, is terrifying. But he is not saying: the Father or death is the thief. What he is saying is: the coming of the kingdom is compared to the way a thief operates ... quiet, sudden, and certainly unknown to you. But unlike the thief, the coming of the Lord and his kingdom will bring with it immense joy. It would be like a child waiting for the appearance of a parent who has been away so long; he is only told that the parent is coming but is not told of the time.

And when the parent shows up, there will be certainly gifts, goodies, and a lot of hugs!

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To be prepared doesn't mean to have achieved and accomplished all our plans. It means: to be true to our responsibilities at each present moment. There is a story of a monk in a certain monastery; he was given charge of sweeping and polishing the floors of the monastery daily. Someone asked him what he would do if he knew he was going to die within one hour. Well, he said simply, I will just go on sweeping and polishing the floor. He meant: faithfulness to your duty at each moment, at all moments ... that is true readiness.

Jesus is talking about different kinds of servants or stewards. In the East at that time, a steward had immense and awesome power. He was himself a slave like all his fellow slaves, yet had control of the other slaves. He ran the house for the master and administered the Estate. As in many parables of masters and slaves, Jesus is talking about an absentee landlord...someone who was away most times. And occasionally, he came back to check on the house and the estate. The absentee landlord had great trust in his steward. This is a challenging picture of the Father by Jesus. After all, God left the whole of creation for his masterpieces, man and woman, to manage creation. He even entrusted his only son into our hands. Aren't we human beings, made in God's image and likeness, and therefore: responsible caretakers or stewards? Not to dominate, but to love the world as God loved it. Did we use every opportunity to make good use of our gifts, our responsibilities so that life would become better?