

*“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”<sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert!<sup>cl</sup> You do not know when that time will come.<sup>34</sup> It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” Mark 13:32-37*

The premise of the old “Candid Camera” television show theme would go like this: “When it’s least expected...smile you’re on Candid Camera”! In fact most of the humor on the show was derived from the shock of people on the show realizing their reactions to the situations presented them would be shown on television.

Things are unexpected because they creep up on you unaware. A couple of months ago I was driving late at night when I was stopped by a policeman. I knew I wasn’t breaking the speed limit or running any lights, so I was a bit surprised by him stopping me.

So it was a total shock when he told me I had been weaving a bit on the road, and he wanted to see if I had been under the influence. I was not, but I want to tell you I never expected that to happen that evening. However the other side of this is that I should have been rested enough when I drove to begin with. So when you come down to it, it really *shouldn’t* have been a total surprise.

First Advent is always devoted to the second return of Our Lord, as we prepare to celebrate his first return to earth. For most the thought of God coming in judgment and pulling the curtain down on the earth was not unusual. The religious tradition that Jesus lived in had much tradition and speculation on that idea. Jesus speaks much about his return, and it is oblivious that his followers really wanted to know when it all would happen.

This Jesus does not do. Instead he takes (and I might add this was the approach that Jesus used throughout the gospels) the “candid camera approach”, “when it’s least expected...” The flood came when it’s least expected, though I might add everybody should have wondered why some old guy was building this huge watercraft without a body of water to put it in. Minding one’s own business and working hard without interruption in routine is expected so it is a loss when one is taken, though people do get sick and one should have a “contingency” plan in case one does take sick.

A thief in the night is unexpected, but there are things we can do to prepare for the thief. It reminds of the story I had with a pastor of a downtown church in another city. He told me how people complained about the safety factor, and yet in some cases people were inviting a thief to break into their cars by leaving valuable items in plain view. A surprise yes, totally unexpected? No.

How are you living your life in regards to the Lord’s return? Are you procrastinating? Do you assume life will go on as it usually does? Or are you living to expect the unexpected...when it’s least expected?

*The great Dwight L. Moody used to say “I never preach a sermon without thinking that possibly the Lord may come before I preach another.” Dr. G Campbell Morgan, the distinguished British Clergyman said, “I never begin my work in the morning without thinking that perhaps He may interrupt my work and begin his own. I am not looking for death, I am looking for Him.” That is the way a Christian should live his life, in constant anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ! If we could live every day as though it might be the very last one before the final judgment, what a difference it would make here on earth! But we don’t like to think that way. We don’t like to think that our carefully made plans, our long range schemes may be interrupted by the trumpet of God. Too many people would rather say “Oh well, the end of the world hasn’t come yet, so why think about it, it’s probably a thousand years away.”*

So you and I could go on, business as usual, responding in our lives to God with the same attitude of business as usual. But if God’s word is true and our ascent to the creed is true, my brothers and sisters....when its least expected.....

Pr. John Van Haneghan