

I know you usually don't talk during a sermon but I'm going to invite you to share your creative thoughts on this scenario. You are the editor of a major newspaper. A reporter has just come to you with one of the most bizarre stories you've ever come across. I'd like you to share your thoughts on what you'd use as the headline. The story is this. The President of the United States had just come back from a long line of major diplomatic visits throughout the world. Upon returning to the White House he immediately changed into old clothes. He grabbed a step ladder, some paper towels, a squeegee and a bottle of Windex and he went outside and began washing the windows! What would your headline be? Can you imagine what the talk shows would make of such a thing? How about the late night comedians?

The President of the United States does not wash windows, unless he has a very weird interest in menial labor. No, he is too important to be about such tasks. He makes decisions that influence our country and perhaps the whole world. Washing windows is servant stuff. It requires no talent and no real skill. Can you imagine if the president had to turn down a

state visit to a foreign country because he had to wash windows at home!?!

The one parable we find Jesus giving in our gospel reading is similarly absurd. In verses 36-38 he says, "Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves."

Say what!?! A master would come home from a banquet and expect staff to be awake and then serve them? No, a ludicrous idea! The master could come home and perhaps expect one staff member to be awake and waiting and then the staff member would serve the master a night cap or something. That is reasonable. But masters to not serve their servants or slaves. Once a year the Romans had a holiday where the slaves and masters roles were reversed. It was all in fun and no slave would dare to really ask his or her master to do something hard. The next day was

coming and the roles would be back to normal. Outside of that masters did not serve slaves.

Some people might like the idea of being a slave to God in this lifetime and then being served by God in eternal life, but that is really missing the point of the parable, and it has nothing to do with watchfulness. No, Jesus has something else in mind here, something much deeper.

All of this has to do with watchfulness for the coming of Christ. We don't think about this too often. People who do focus on it we may consider to be some sort of faith weirdos. The Left Behind books and movies were seen by many as essential to understanding the future. Others labeled them foolish fantasy. In our scientific culture that wants clear concrete answers and provable facts, watchfulness for the coming of Christ (and having that be a major part of your life) comes off sounding naïve.

But as Christians, if we ignore this ultimate coming of Christ, if we ignore the hopes and dreams of eternal life and don't have them be a part of our life's understanding now, we

are missing a major driving force of our faith. And let's face it, if this life is all there is - and even if you manage to "make it" and have lots of stuff and lots of friends and lots of prestige - you're still living a pretty hollow life. We need to keep the promise of the resurrection, God's promises of eternal life, and the promise of Jesus' ultimate coming in our hearts and minds. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:19)

So, we watch. How? Do we build bomb shelters and stock them with food? Do we stare up at the sky until we see Jesus descending? Do we memorize our Bibles and do nothing other than worship God; never going to jobs and never sleeping?

This little parable of the master serving the slaves gives us some answers. It reminds us that God is not up there, far away, removed, aloof and impossible to reach. No, God is here. God is close. God is all around us. And God is not surrounding us like a slave driver who is interested in ordering us about from minute to minute. In this little parable we find that both the master and the slaves have been engaged in service. The

slaves have been serving the master, and the master has also served the slaves. And they have been in service together.

The cross reminds us of God's willingness to serve the slaves. But while the cross was a once and done event that took place in history a couple millennia ago, it is not God's only act of service. It is God's ultimate act of service, yes, but God didn't stop then. God continues to serve each and every day. God serves beside you, within you, behind you, and ahead of you.

Being prepared isn't so much about waiting as it is about living every day in partnership with God, working side by side with God.

I've never watched the TV show Undercover Boss but if I understand it correctly a corporate executive goes undercover and poses as an ordinary employee at the bottom of the corporate totem pole. The boss works side by side with the employees, and hopefully both learn from the experience. If I am right, that is a model of faith.

I know it can be hard to imagine God right beside, partnering with you in everything you do, but it is real. An example I use for my own life is something that happened when I was a senior in high school. My parents decided to build a small implement and grain storage shed on our small farm. My dad being one of the world's biggest do-it-yourselfer went about it in his normal way. And his slave labor force - me - was called into action.

Now when I say my dad was a do-it-yourselfer I really mean it. We didn't hire contractors and we didn't do anything we couldn't do with our own hands. The site for the shed was on a slight hillside and it was covered with small trees and brush. We cut down the trees with a chain saw and pulled out the stumps with a tractor. We leveled the site with a plow and digging by hand. We dug the foundation by hand. We made forms for the concrete with used plywood and other lumber. For the foundation we didn't call a concrete company to come with a truck and pour it into the forms. No, we went to the quarry with our pick-up truck and hauled sand and stone. We bought bags of cement. We didn't have a cement mixer so we mixed all the concrete for the foundation by hand in a wheelbarrow. It was back-breaking,

blister producing labor. I never knew how hard it was to build something until we took on that project.

Now we didn't cut down our own trees and saw them by hand - although my dad was no stranger to doing things that way. No, mercifully we bought lumber from a nearby sawmill. It was rough cut and unfinished but that was okay. Cut by cut, nail by nail the building went up. A couple relatives helped on a few days. We did everything to the roof and to the trim. The building stands today straight and true, a testament to hard work.

God is an even bigger do-it-yourselfer than my dad. God certainly took on the do-it-yourself work of saving the world on the cross himself.

Watching and waiting for Jesus' coming by partnering with God isn't easy. I guarantee you there will be lots and lots and lots of hard work. There will be hit thumbs, splinters, blisters, and other injuries. But you have a solid and secure partner with you growing with you and teaching you. I've never learned more or better than by experiencing things first hand. Ultimately we remember Jesus words, "Do not be afraid, little

flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Amen