

How in the world are we supposed to prepare for an event of cosmic magnitude, an event more powerful than the moon, the sun, the stars, and even the supernatural “powers in the heavens?” What on earth could we do that would make any difference? Jesus’s words make me think of the old roadrunner and coyote cartoons, when the coyote would look up and see an anvil falling directly on top of him, and he would open up a tiny umbrella immediately before he met his fate.

I suppose that would be adequate for a cartoon character who will inevitably be restored to his unflattened state to be ready for the next gag. But of course, in the real world, the consequences of being unprepared can be severe.

Israel was unprepared for the October 7 terrorist attacks launched by Hamas. The global audience and Israelis themselves were shocked that the much-vaunted Israeli military and intelligence services had not known of the plot in advance. Except, a few days ago, it came out that in fact, Israeli officials had obtained a copy of the attack plan, but dismissed it as impossible, even though their intelligence had also seen Hamas militants training to carry out specific elements of the plan.

The Israelis were aware, but still, they were not prepared, and the results were tragic for both Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

But again, if they could get that wrong, what hope do we have for dealing with the greatest, most disruptive event that ever could happen? Well, quite a lot, as it turns out. The most important thing to know about the End Times is that they are not the work of an enemy, but of Jesus himself, our friend, our brother, our mediator, our advocate. Jesus will love us no less than he did when he died for us, and no less than he does now, for he is Love incarnate. Love is not merely a feeling for Jesus; Love is his fundamental nature.

But this raises another question: if Jesus’s second coming will be so overwhelmingly powerful, why would we need to do anything? Perhaps you’ve visited a loved one who shows their love by insisting on taking care of everything for you. “Don’t mind, I’ve got it, make yourself at home, don’t lift a finger or put yourself to any trouble.” If ordinary human beings can be so accommodating, surely the one who fed thousands, turned water into wine, healed the sick, liberated the possessed, and raised the dead can take care of whatever needs taking care of.

But again, think of how Jesus worked the first time. Perhaps he could have worked alone, but he didn’t. He called disciples, and gave them specific responsibilities. He engaged with people, even answering questions from his enemies. So when he comes again, I don’t think he’ll wall himself off, issuing orders and doling out resources like the central computer in some dystopian sci-fi city. I think he’ll genuinely be delighted to be with us in person again.

Will we be delighted to be with him? Or rather, who will be delighted to be with him? These questions bring us closer to understanding what it means to be ready for Jesus. His return will certainly be great news for the poor, the sick, the broken, the

despised, the lost, and the forgotten. But for the rich, the self-righteous, those who trust in themselves, and all who lied about who Jesus is and did terrible things in his name... I imagine they will have a harder time. Even though most of them have heard the same words that we just heard. I suspect that many of them will be aware, but unprepared.

The rest of us who don't feel like we fit into either group have more good news. Our question should not be "how in the world?" or "what on earth?" St. Paul pointed out that our help, our hope, and our sure deliverance come from the same transcendent source of overwhelming power. The Holy Spirit is always with us, and she ensures that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. She will also strengthen us to the end so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In every way, we have been enriched by Jesus. We are not lacking in any spiritual gift. So much so that we can accomplish great things. We can do the impossible. But only if we do it together.

God's gifts are abundant, but they are scattered. It is like someone with a large household who all do different jobs to make the house ready, and a doorkeeper to keep watch. Everyone has talents, though no individual has them all, or even enough of them to go it alone. There's no point in preparing the house if no one will open the door, and there's no point in opening the door if the house isn't prepared. And so if we are to accomplish anything, if we are even to live, in any meaningful sense of the word, we have to work together.

Today at Advent, we are celebrating one very important way in which we work together: the conclusion of our stewardship drive in our great ingathering. I hope this year's drive has made your spiritual lives richer, by reframing generosity as a joyful act of gratitude that affirms our identity as God's beloved followers. But whatever motivates you to support our church, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And if you haven't yet completed your pledge card, please return it as soon as can so we can add you to our thank-you list, which we'll be updating every week for the rest of the month.

Because of our discipleship, our choosing to listen to the words of Jesus, we are aware, and our ongoing generosity of time, talent, and money shows that we are prepared to greet Jesus as he comes at Christmas, and as he will come at the End, for such grateful generosity shows he is also already present in the hearts, souls, and wills of all who have accepted the Spirit's call into his fellowship. None of us can keep watch at all times, but God is always keeping watch over us, so when God dwells in us, not only does hell have no power over us, but with God's strength and faithfulness, we are indeed sufficiently prepared for anything that earth or heaven might have in store for us.