

Like a Thief in the Night

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Keep awake therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. - Matthew 24: 43,44

A lady here in Albuquerque received a phone call last week from her neighbor. "Are you watching TV?" ... "No," the lady answered. ... "Well, I'm not surprised," said the neighbor. "A guy just came out your kitchen window carrying a TV." ... "Oh, my gosh! Where did he go?" ... "I don't know, but he stole your pickup." ... "He stole my truck! Who was it?" ... "I didn't see his face, but I got the license plate number."

There's going to be a break-in soon at a time we don't expect. Not everyone thinks of Jesus in terms of a thief in the night, but that's what he says above. There are more sorts of break-ins than one might think. "The question is," says Barbara Brown-Taylor, "What's he after?"

"What's Jesus after?" In the old movie, *To Steal a Million*, starring Audrey Hepburn and Peter O'Toole, the father of the character played by Audrey Hepburn is a painter, an art forger. Her grandfather was a sculptor, also an art forger. And although her family has gotten away with forgery for decades, the world of science is catching up with art forgers. Scientific tests are available now that can determine whether a piece of art is the real thing.

So, there's a break-in at the museum in Paris. (Actually a lock-in. O'Toole and Hepburn hide in a closet before the museum closes.) It's late at night, and the two are in the museum to steal her grandfather's fraudulent sculpture, the Cellini Venus. The next day the museum is going to test the statue for authenticity. The thieves are after it, not for monetary gain, but to get rid of it lest her family be exposed as a fraud by the test.

Just as Audrey Hepburn and Peter O'Toole come as thieves in the night, Barbara Brown-Taylor says, "If Jesus is who Matthew says he is (above) then he's not interested in your jewelry or TV. He's interested in **you**, although not the day time you, the one most people see while you are out doing whatever you do in the world, pulled together well enough that you pass for normal... Whatever else is going on inside you, it is usually possible to manage it during the daylight hours, if only because everyone else seems to be managing, too.

"But then you get home and the children are needy and the cat is hungry and the e-mail has piled up. Once you have dealt with it all, it is dark. The sink is full of dishes. The news is on. Tonight is when you were going to balance the checkbook. The evening passes the way so many do. It's over before you know it and you are the last one awake. You check the doors and the windows before you head off to bed... There's not another sound in the house. Now is when you should listen for that thief, because now is when he is interested in you, now when you think no one else is watching... Since you are not expecting anything save a few uneventful hours in bed, now is an excellent time for him to slip past your defenses, disarm your security system, and enter your safe space.

“Why would a compassionate Lord do a thing like that? Because you are so well protected the rest of the time. Because now is the only time when your guard is down. After years of practice, you have learned how to keep almost everyone and everything at a safe distance while you are awake, but any good thief knows that even you have to sleep. That is why he waits until way after dark. That is why he comes when you least expect it – because he knows how badly you need to be broken into, and how hard you will resist.”

And whereas Peter O'Toole and Audrey Hepburn break-in so her family won't be exposed as a fraud, Jesus breaks in to expose and change our false self, to make us into more the genuine article.