



A GENERATION IN NEED!

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The Zombie



Apocalypse!

What is it about the apocalyptic genre that fills the box office, hits the New York best sellers list, or captures a large percentage of television viewers week after week? Why are so many fixating on the idea of a global threat to humanity through what is being called the zombie apocalypse? Recently I read the following Facebook status from a former student with whom I have shared the gospel but who has not embraced it, "Does anybody ever feel that dealing with student loans, taxes, health insurance, rent, car payments, credit card payments, and everything else, that it would be easier if we were just living in a zombie apocalypse and we were just trying to survive and get food and shelter or bullets and a baseball bat to protect us from the undead?"

What's troubling about this statement is that it is, I believe, a serious lament about his and many other students' present frustration and lack of hope in their lives. Perhaps this statement also reveals a glimpse of why there is such a popular fascination with the apocalyptic genre. Could it be that in the ups, downs, twists and turns of

being entertained by fiction, we find a sense of comfort from knowing that in the end it will end well, and we desperately want that in our own lives? Perhaps the idea of being rescued from an end of the world threat connects us with an underlying hope we all have when crisis, pressure and fear throw us into what I call our own kind of micro-apocalypse, and the irrepressible feeling that our own world is coming to an end.

I believe that at our core we all sense an approaching apocalypse and a desperate need for a Savior to provide the cure for this infectious disease called sin pulsing through our spiritual veins. Without a Savior, we are like the "walking dead," functioning at a sub-level of what it means to truly be created "in his image." Our appetite to consume things of the flesh will never bring authentic satisfaction and change, any more than a zombie could be satisfied after feasting on human flesh. And I am convinced that all this... all of this.... points us to the only source of hope to be found, the only place where lasting transformation is possible, the only known cure and antidote for our broken spiritual immune system... the person and work of Jesus Christ! It is His sacrifice and resurrection that gives hope, His blood that cures, and His work on the cross that somehow becomes the syringe that injects His Spirit into our hungry veins, supplying us with the necessary pure blood transfusion to make us a new creation. And it is His very Spirit who then becomes our "Helper," our new immune system if you will, who works to eradicate our former selfish desires while continuously transforming, restoring, sanctifying, healing and saving!

We resonate and are drawn to epic humanity-threatening stories about a hero who conquers the villain, saves the world, and corrects injustice because they connect us with the Gospel!

On campus we find that when approached correctly, these current popular apocalyptic stories can be used to reverse engineer

and peel back the various layers, to reveal God's core story of redemption and share the Gospel. One example would be this year's Fall Retreat titled, "The Zombie Apocalypse and the will of God." It was our largest fall retreat ever with over 180 students and staff from MA and NY. Our planning team came up with the popular Zombie theme and we used the hit television series "The Walking Dead" to connect current story to the core story. Before the retreat even began, without students knowing it, some of their name tags were marked with an ultraviolet pen indicating that they were already infected with the zombie virus, but more on that in a moment...



On Friday night after powerful student-led worship, I presented the first of a two-part message titled "The Micro Apocalypse" where I used three separate stories: The story of Peter in prison, John the Baptist in prison, and Rick Grimes (the hero in the Walking Dead series) who was facing his own personal micro-apocalypse in the midst of an all-out zombie apocalypse. I randomly alternated in small parts through each of the three stories to show how God's will is often counter to our own expectations. I played a movie clip from an episode where Rick, depleted, full of despair, desperate for hope and direction, finds himself drawn to a small church.

Standing alone in front of the altar, he quietly stares at a statue of Jesus hanging on a cross. With blood running down the Lord's face from the thorny crown pressed on his head, and a haunting expression full of compassion, empathy and love captured by the artist... Rick awkwardly begins to pray... *I don't know if you're looking at me with what? Sadness? Scorn? Pity? Love?... Maybe it's just indifference... I guess you already know I'm not much of a believer. I guess I just chose to put my faith elsewhere. My family, mostly... My friends... My job. The thing is, we... I could use a little something to help keep us going. Some kind of acknowledgment. Some indication I'm doing the right thing. You don't know how hard that is to know... Well, maybe you do. (Rick then begins to walk away, but turns and comes back) Hey look, I don't need all the answers. Just a little nudge. A sign.. Any sign will do!*

Rick leaves the church and in the scene immediately after this heartfelt prayer seeking God's direction and a sign, in an unexpected turn no one saw coming, Rick's son is suddenly shot! Switching to the story of Peter, he is miraculously rescued from prison. And then over to story of John the Baptist waiting in prison... John receives these words sent from Jesus, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." Soon after, John hears the footsteps of soldiers approaching his cell, they are not coming to release him, and instead one holds a platter for his head to be placed upon... John is beheaded!

I went on to emotionally explain that foundational to understanding God's will is the realization that it can be messy and in our own micro-apocalypses there is hope to be found in the greater core story. At the cross Jesus in his humanity faced his own micro-apocalypse while at the very same moment his divinity eternally secured victory for us once and for all in the real and epic apocalyptic battle!

Right at the conclusion of my message a loud alarm sounded and a video made by some of our very creative students came on the large screen. Newscasters explained how a digital virus had mutated into a biological virus and was infecting people worldwide, turning them into zombies. Anyone exposed to a digital computer or cellphone screen could be infected! Staff dressed in military camouflage quickly entered the room as students were lined up to have their name tags scanned with a UV flashlight. Those previously infected were quarantined as zombies away from the others. (Many students opted for avail-

able makeup to really play the part.) Those not infected were given a strip of cloth clothes-pinned onto their waist. It was explained that if a zombie was successful at getting their strip of cloth they would become zombies too. We set up safe zones where no one could be attacked, however the dessert table in the cafeteria was not one of them. Picture zombies slowly dragging their feet in a zombie crawl around the brownies, taunting those who were uninfected to try to get one! Some staff were given the power (UV pens) to secretly infect people who were careless enough to leave their name tags unattended, as routine scans were done at multiple points through the day to identify anyone infected unaware. Then everything ended Saturday night in an all-out war played over acres of camp property in what truly was epic! Prizes were awarded for best zombie, last survivors and other categories. Then we had a huge bonfire concluding the night with hours of fellowship and worship. On Sunday morning I presented the second part of my message that focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and how God's will is to use us in His story regardless of how we may at times make wrong decisions. But the heart of the retreat was not my presentations, or the epic zombie game. The heart of the retreat was the large amount of time where students gathered with other students from their campuses into small groups as well as individual personal time to wrestle with their own micro-apocalypses, decisions and individual circumstances while seeking God's will. Can you picture this... well over a hundred students talking with their campus ministers, working through prepared questions and material to challenge and focus them. And in a spirit of worship and prayer asking, seeking and praying for God to lead and direct them through their struggles... now that's EPIC!!!!

For those who receive this newsletter and support our ministry, thank you for being part of this epic adventure. You make it possible for us to present the gospel in creative and relevant ways to this "generation in need."

If you are not currently supporting us, please consider making a commitment to support us on a regular basis, or even with a onetime end-of-year donation. Your generosity and financial sacrifice not only enables us to do this ministry, but serves as a confirmation that God has called us to reach students. It also serves indirectly as a witness to the students with whom I share.

When I am able to fund a retreat like this for a student who otherwise would not be able to come, and I am able to explain how there are others churches and individuals who love them too, this helps to build the case for them that God loves them even more. Thank you again so much. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and blessings in the upcoming year!

Annie's Corner:

Joe's health has been good this year. He is always very busy. Especially this fall with all his preparation for the fall retreat, meetings, Bible studies and all the other doings, he also performed two weddings, one for his niece and one for Sam and Kelleigh who are both former students and Sam is on staff with Joe serving at Fitchburg State! This Fall has also been one of change as I was given the opportunity to work in the mail room at Nichols College. This allows us to receive health insurance through my work and greatly lowers the amount of money needed to be raised for the missions health care premiums. In addition I am getting to know pretty much everyone on campus!

Our Son Jeremiah is engaged to Katie Smith a beautiful partner for our son. They met through the ministry at Worcester State and will both graduate in May. They have not set a date just yet for the wedding but we will keep you posted. Joey and David are doing well and are attending Quinsigamund Community College in Worcester and continue to be involved in the ministry. Our youngest son Sam began the school year off with a ruptured appendix and two days in the hospital. He has recovered nicely and doing well and very active in the high school marching band. Please continue to pray for Joe's health, our family, the ministry, staff, and the need to raise support not just for ourselves but for Joe's staff as well so they can all be on campus reaching students. God Bless and Merry Christmas to all!

To join us in financial support just fill out the envelope enclosed with this newsletter with a check made out to Missions Door. Please include a separate note that you would like to support Joe and Annie Shea and how often in faith you plan to donate. If you do not have an envelope use the address at the bottom of this page or go online to our website.

Shea's current support status 87%
Additional support needed \$725/month