

11-29-2020 SERMON CCI Mark 13.24-37 Wake Up and Stay Awake!

Was anyone lulled to sleep with your eyes closed in the darkness as today's scripture reading was read? IS ANYONE STILL NAPPING? WAKE UP!

Jesus' words in today's scripture were said in response to some questions the disciples asked Jesus. Jesus and his disciples were walking out of the Jerusalem temple when one disciple marveled at the beauty and majesty of the temple. Have you ever experienced awe inside a truly beautiful church building? Rob and I had that experience in the Catholic Basilica in Denver with its large sanctuary with high ceilings, shining marble floors, huge murals of Bible people, candles lit in several places, lovely stained glass windows, and the peaceful silence. We both had a sense of the greatness of God there. I imagine the disciple that day with Jesus expected Jesus to share his awe of the Temple.

But Jesus was blunt. "This temple will soon be demolished so that not one of these beautiful stones will remain on another." The disciples wanted to know when? Jesus began to describe the dark time coming, a time when family members would turn on each other, there will be wars and rumors of even more wars, changes in the earth with earthquakes and increasing famines that will cause great hunger. Darkness. The disciples won't be protected either; they will be dragged into court and punished for their faith in Christ.

And then the deepest darkness that any Jewish person could imagine would happen right there in that beautiful Temple before it is destroyed. It will be so dark that everyone will run for their lives. History tells us what happened. In 66 AD, the Romans attacked Jerusalem and the Jewish forces at first held them back. But 2 years into the war, it was clear that the Romans were going to win, and some of the Jewish Zealots took over the Temple and kicked out the priests. They did whatever they wanted, they were all going to die anyway so "eat, drink, and be merry." They entered even the most holy places where only the High Priest was allowed to be, they murdered people in drunken brawls in the Temple, and finally, they anointed a wicked man, Phanni, as the new High Priest, and dressed him in the priestly robes. It was a very dark time. God's own people desecrated God's Temple, and faithful Jews and Christians ran for the hills because they knew the destruction of the Temple would soon come. It would be

like the board members of this church holding drunken parties in the church, having sex on the pews, making profane speeches from the pulpit, singing songs full of f words around the church piano, serving dinner from the communion table, and anointing one of themselves as the new Pastor. If that sounds shocking, that was what it was like to the faithful in AD 68. The Temple was destroyed, just as Jesus said, in AD 70 by the Romans.

Our scripture reading began in verse 24 with:

“But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

These are apocalyptic words, words about the end of time using metaphors for what will happen on planet earth, because AD 70 wasn't the last dark time. We have dark times today too. Perhaps the death of a dear loved one- your spouse of many years, or a brother, sister, friend, or parent, or a child's death that brings a dark night of the soul. Or raging fires that destroy hundreds of homes, or hurricanes or tornados destroying everything. Wars with thousands dead. Or this virus taking the lives of 265,000 people here and more every day, millions out of work, businesses closed, all of us unable to be together, losing so much of what makes our lives precious, and a bitter election full of distrust, broken relationships, and fear of the future. These are dark days right now for so many.

Thankfully, Jesus described the coming light- his coming to earth- not as a vulnerable baby in a manger, but returning in the clouds with power and glory. God's angels being sent out to the four corners of the globe and even to those in heaven to gather together all God's people from their spread out places. There is no place so dark or hidden or forgotten that the angels cannot find them and gather them in. It is good news to us stuck in our homes and unable to be with those we love. No face masks will be needed, no sitting 6 feet apart around God's banquet table; no, we'll sit elbow to elbow talking and laughing, passing the platters and bowls of food, telling stories of God's grace over the centuries, renewing old friendships, and making new ones, no fears that someone may have Covid, and no one's seat at the table will be empty. All God's people will be together, the ones we've known and loved, the ones we've known and not loved, and those we have yet to meet; people from every nation, color,

language, religious experience, all joined by our common faith in Christ, never to be separated again. Every injustice will be overthrown by justice, every wrong made right, evil and its companion death vanquished. The darkness will be gone and all that will be left is light and love.

Jesus' words are good news to the weary waiting soul. But that time is yet to come. 2000 years later and we are still waiting. Jesus' words, "Stay awake!" are as needed by us today as they were that day at the Temple. We all know what it's like to wait a long time. Research tells us that people sitting in the waiting area of an ER waiting to be treated by a doctor are quite alert at first. Every name that is called makes them sit up to see if it is theirs. Nope Bob Smith. Another name, is it mine? Nope, Susie Johnson. Finally, after awhile of waiting and listening, and not being called, people grow dull and drowsy until when their name **is** finally called, they may not hear it even after several calls. The same is true about waiting for the Lord's return; staying awake and alert while we wait is hard; we can grow drowsy and dull.

So what are we to do to stay ready? Jesus described the master of a wealthy household, with servants, slaves, and hired hands. The master was about to leave on a journey, so he called his servants, slaves, and hired hands together and told them to take care of everything in his absence. Each person had a job to do- whether it was cooking meals for everyone still at home, washing dishes, keeping the house clean, caring for the animals and the crops, cleaning out the barn, fixing what breaks, buying supplies, taking their shift watching out for thieves, whatever their job, they were to be busy about their task so whenever the master returns, everything, including themselves, is ready. No sleeping on the job, no stealing the silverware, no getting lazy, or mistreating the others because the master is gone. Stay awake and alert. Be ready. No one knows when the master will return, not even the master himself.

Everyone one of us has been gifted with abilities and experiences to be used in Jesus' name to serve others. We're called to use them while we wait. We don't need to waste time trying to figure out the day Christ will return, just be faithful to the jobs Jesus left in our hands. Big jobs or little jobs, they're all important. A few weeks ago we explored some ways of loving neighbors that are so important to Jesus that he said when we do these things for others, we've done them for him- feeding the hungry,

sharing water with the thirsty, caring for sick and lonely, caring for strangers in need, visiting those in prisons of any kind. Are you musical-keep singing and playing for the lonely. Thank you to Velma and Al and Dorothy hay for doing this over the phone. Do you have enough to share-give generously. Do you have joy- make phone calls and send cards that bring joy. Do you cook- make extra and give it away. Lend your heart and your time to listen to others' pain and bring light. Continue to stand against injustice and **for** the needs of the most vulnerable. And over all of it, look for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The needs today are even bigger than in Jesus' day. Like those servants, hired hands, and slaves in Jesus' story, we have each been given tasks to do while we wait. If we've let ourselves and our faith become drowsy or dull, it's time to wake up and be about our task, our calling.

Christian writer C.S Lewis said it this way in 1950: "For what comes is judgement; happy are those whom it finds labouring in their vocations, whether they were merely going out to feed the pigs or laying good plans to deliver humanity a hundred years hence from some great evil. The curtain has indeed now fallen. Those pigs will never in fact be fed, the great campaign against white slavery or governmental tyranny will never in fact proceed to victory. No matter; you were at your post when the inspection came." Let's wake up and stay awake, the Master comes.