

Exodus 12: 1-14  
Psalm 149  
Romans 13: 8-14  
St. Matthew 18: 15-20

Pentecost 15 2023.

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“It is full time for you to wake from sleep.”

Romans 13: 11

Starting as a kid,, then helping as a teenager, and then as an adult, for years I was involved with residential summer church camps... If the camp for a group of boys lasted for a week, I learned long ago that the sleeping patterns tended to fall into a predictable pattern: On the *first* night, the kids never went to sleep as soon as the adults hoped they would. The new place and the new friends were such an adventure!...

On the *last* day of the camp, the boys would be awake late – excited about seeing their parents or loved ones...

In contrast, however, on the second night (that is, the first full day of camp), the boys would usually fall asleep right away – first, because they likely didn’t have a full sleep from the night before; and second, the days were usually full of strenuous physical activity. As well, we would change the clocks one hour so it would seem as if the sun were setting earlier...

There would be the occasional keen boy who would wake up right away, to go for a morning dip before breakfast. However, for the most part, waking the boys for the *third* day of camp required a very loud voice, or a very loud whistle. You know what it’s like to wake up a groggy kid?... They had to wake from a deep sleep, because it was already past dawn, and time for an exciting new day!...

The second reading for today is from Romans 13. At the end of the chapter, Paul uses the analogy of sleep and wakefulness to explain about our conduct as Christians:

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Something *new* has begun in us when we are followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to “wake up from sleep...” Now, of course we need physical sleep. But Paul is presenting a picture, an analogy – there needs to a *spiritual* sharpness, a *spiritual* awareness: What is God up to, in the world around us?... How can we cooperate with that?... At the same time, where are the spiritual dangers which we need to avoid?...

Like ourselves, the early Christians did not know when the Lord Jesus would return as King. But they did know that in God's timing, it would be *very soon*, and people of faith needed to be spiritually ready. Besides, who knows how long our lives will be, and when our days will end?... We need to be ready to meet the Lord, each and every day...

For people who do not have faith, we might say as if they are in a kind of spiritual sleep-walking – focused on their own inner interests, and largely unaware of the bigger realities around us all...

Do you remember the story in the Old Testament, when a foreign army is about to invade the city where the prophet Elisha was staying? All these chariots and soldiers had surrounded the city to capture Elisha, and Elisha's servant is terrified:

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, 'Alas, master! What shall we do?' He replied, 'Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.' Then Elisha prayed: 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (II Kings 6: 15-17)

In fact, God's army of angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven, was far, far greater than the Syrian army. In the end, the Syrian army is struck with a kind of spiritual blindness, and they leave without capturing the prophet... I suggest we need to notice, *the spiritual presence was there all along* – it was just unnoticed to many...

Likewise, I suggest that our worship is not meant to be rote, dull, or unimaginative. We are worshipping the living Lord of heaven and earth!... I suggest that our proper response is to anticipate this wonderful encounter, with this Friend who will never leave us. As we worship, Christians throughout history have joyfully proclaimed that we are joining *our* worship with the worship of heaven, in all its wonder and glory!...

We are not alone. God's grace is all around us, and filling us... The very angels of God are near – even if we don't see them with our outward eyes. We have every reason to be awake; alert; joy-full...

For the early Church, our spiritual alertness was not an end in itself, like an animal which becomes alert when it hears a strange noise. We become awake and alert, so that in response, we live in ways which glorify God...

Today's second reading continues,

Let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

When we are spiritually awake, we're called to live beautifully for God...

Ephesians 2: 10 explains it this way: "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

Once we are spiritually awake, we are called to *live out* our lives in a way which is beautiful for God. We aren't meant to keep on with old, selfish, sinful ways. With whatever gifts God has given each one of us, we are meant to embrace them, to build up the Church (I Corinthians 12: 7), to carry out God's mission (Luke 10: 1-10 *et al.*)...

The Lord Jesus does not promise that it will always be easy. But we are assured of his presence and his grace, every step of the way...

This is played out in countless ways in our daily lives, but I'm going to point out just one example, from today's gospel passage: When we've been hurt, we need to seek the path of being restored with that person, by going to them directly (not drawing others in, unnecessarily). Matthew 18: 15: "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one."

(The Lord Jesus goes on to instruct us, his followers, how to proceed in that painful and powerful process of forgiveness, when the other person is unwilling...)

The old Anglican Exhortations explain this process, as one of the preparations to receive the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist:

The way and means thereto is: First, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to confess yourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life. And if ye shall perceive your offences to have been against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile yourselves to them, being ready to make restitution. Ye must also be ready to forgive others that have offended you, as you would have forgiveness of your offences at God's hand.

If we have hurt others, we need to try to sort it out. If others have hurt *us*, we need to be prepared to forgive – just as the Lord Jesus has forgiven us...

So, we are called to *wake up!* We are to be spiritually alert and alive, ready to serve God in whatever way we are called. This plays out in many ways – but one of them is the hard but powerful process of receiving forgiveness, and offering forgiveness...

May we be equipped by God's Spirit, to live out his holy Word...

Amen.