

Awake, Awake

1 Peter 4:7-8 Mark 13:24-37

November 29, 2020

A doctor polled 3,000 people and asked them this simple question: "What are you living for?" Guess what she found. Over 90 percent of the people were WAITING for something significant to change or happen in their lives and in the lives of those with whom they were involved. Let me share a few examples:

A middle-aged couple was waiting for the next stage of their lives in retirement. Another couple was waiting for their children to get married. A younger couple was waiting to have a child.

A college student was waiting for the graduation. A young man was waiting to work in a company. A young woman was waiting to begin a new business.

A younger child said he was waiting for the day when his Dad no longer had to sleep on the couch and could sleep in the bedroom.

What are you waiting for?

Advent is a season of waiting. We, Christians are waiting for Christ to come to the world. Yes, we believe that "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

Early Christians strongly believed the imminent coming back of Jesus Christ. And they diligently waiting for Christ coming back to the world.

Some, however kept asking questions, "When would he come back? How would he return to the world?"

Some were so anxious about His imminent coming back that they gradually did not pay attention their present living.

Some were getting antsy and doubting because the returning of Christ did not happen as quickly as they hoped and expected.

To them, Mark reminded of Jesus saying, "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:32-33) And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."(Mark 13:37)

"Don't look up the sky and guess when and how Christ would come. Keep awake now. Be alert."

In another words, Jesus instructed his disciples to focus what they do here and now, rather wasting time to guess when and how Christ returns to the world.

His instruction is valid to you and me, Advent people living in the 21st century. “Be alert and stay awake”

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What does he mean by being alert and staying awake? Do we need to give up sleeping? I don't think so.

Then, how can we be alert and stay awake? What does the Bible say about being alert and staying awake?

Let us turn to 1 Peter 4:7-8.

We find Peter exhorting, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

Eugen Peterson translates these verse this way: “Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything.” (The Message)

Here, we find in this Bible verses two practical lifestyles to follow in order to live as “being alert and staying awake” Christians.

First of all, while waiting for the coming of Christ, we are encouraged to stay wide-awake in prayer. Pray, and you will stay awake. Praying is a sure way to be alert and keep awake.

What is prayer? Many answers might be found out there. One simple answer to this question may be this: Praying is meeting with God. In another word, praying is spending time with God.

Hear Henri Nouwen answering to a question, “why pray?”

“Why should I spend an hour in prayer when I do nothing during that time but think about people I am angry with, people who are angry with me, books I should read, and books I should write, and thousands of other silly things that happen to grab my mind for a moment?”

The answer is: because God is greater than my mind and my heart and what is really happening in the house of prayer is not measurable in terms of human success and failure.

What I must do first of all is to be faithful. If I believe that the first commandment is to love God with my whole heart, mind, and soul, then I should at least be able to spend one hour a day with nobody else but God. The question as to whether it is helpful, useful, practical, or fruitful is completely irrelevant, since the only reason to love is love itself. Everything else is secondary.

The remarkable thing, however, is that sitting in the presence of God for one hour each morning, day after day, week after week, month after month radically changes my life. God, who loves me so much that he sent his only son not to condemn me but to save me, does not leave me waiting in the dark too long.

I might think that each hour is useless, but after thirty or sixty or ninety such useless hours, I gradually realize that I was not as alone as I thought; a very small, gentle voice has been speaking to me far beyond my noisy place.”

Too busy to pray? Bill Hybel, author of a book, “Too busy not to pray” is right. We are too busy not to pray. We are too busy not to take time with God if we believe the first commandment is to love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul.”

Do you remember a teaching about prayer by Jesus, our Lord?

He says to his disciples, " 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Eugene Peterson’s translations goes this way: “Find a quiet, secluded place. .. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” (The Message)

God can and does communicate with us in many ways: via the holy Bible, awesome and beautiful creation, sunset, sunrise, books, events or encounters with others, etc. But some, especially those mystics and contemplatives say “Silence is God’s first language.” The Persian poet Rumi said, “Silence is God’s language; all else is poor translation.”

If we want to hear from God, we must find a quiet, secluded place and shut our mouth and listen. God speaks in silence. God comes to meet with us in silence. God heals us and strengthens us and restores us anew in silence.

Hear Henri Nouwen saying about Holy Silence.

At first silence might only frighten us. In silence we start hearing voices of darkness: our jealousy and anger, our resentment and desire for revenge, our lust and greed, and our pain over losses, abuses, and rejections. These voices are often noisy and boisterous. They may even deafen us. Our most spontaneous reaction is to run away from them and return to our entertainment.

But if we have the discipline to stay put and not let these dark voices intimidate us, they will gradually lose their strength and recede into the background, creating space for the softer, gentler voices of the light.

These voices speak of peace, kindness, gentleness, goodness, joy, hope, forgiveness, and most of all, love. They might at first seem small and insignificant, and we may have a hard time trusting them. However, they are very persistent and they will be stronger if we keep listening.

They come from a very deep place and from very far. They have been speaking to us since before we were born, and they reveal to us that there is no darkness in the One who sent us into the world, only light. They are part of God's voice calling us from all eternity: "My beloved child, my favorite one, my joy."

Praying is God's gift, the most beautiful and wonderful time to cherish and enjoy. Jesus knew it and did find a quiet place with God late night or early in the morning. Following the example of the Lord, we must do spend time in the presence and love of God who loves us dearly and deeply.

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Secondly, to all who are waiting for the coming of Christ, Peter advises us to love each other deeply.

"Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything."
(1 Peter 4:7-8)

Praying is a sure way of "being alert" and "staying awake." Loving is another way of "being alert" and "staying awake" while waiting for the coming of Christ.

John also emphasizes we should love one another.

In his first letter, he writes, "7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love

does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another."

Children always bring us a fresh perspective.

A group of 4 to 8-year-olds was asked: "What does Love mean?" Here were their answers:

"Love is when you kiss all the time," said one. "Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss."

Another said, "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne, and they go out and smell each other."

But one of the children summed it up very much like Jesus: "When my grandmother got arthritis," she said, "she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's Love." Wow. What a beautiful observation.

What is love? 1 Corinthians 13 is known as "Love Chapter." In this chapter, Paul tells us what is love very clearly.

"4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends."

To keep awake and be alert, I want to ask myself daily, "Am I patient? Am I kind? Am I not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude? Do I not insist on my won way? Am I not irritable or resentful? Do I not rejoice in wrongdoing? Do I rejoice in the truth? Do I bear all things? Do I believe all things? Do I hope all things? Do I endure all things?

Do you?

We are entering a season of Advent.

In this Advent season, we do wait, being alert and staying awake.

May we do take time faithfully to love God who loves us and to love others as God has loved us through Christ. Amen. Amen.