

Sermon 10-14-10 “Wake Up!”

Good Morning! My mind is challenged today by the Gospel reading we just heard, to tell you an old story with a new twist. If you remember my telling it before you’ll see why it came to mind this morning.

A father knocks on his son’s door. “David,” he says, “Wake up!” David answers, “I don’t want to get up, Dad.” The father shouts, “Get up, you have to go to school.” David answers. “But I don’t want to go to school, Dad.” “Why not?” asks the father.

“Three reasons,” says David. “First because it’s so dull, second, the kids tease me, and third I hate school.” So then the father answers. “Well, I’m going to give you three reasons why you must go to school. First, because it’s your duty; second, because you’re forty five years old; and third, because you’re the headmaster!”

You may very well have heard this story before—I told it last year! A Jesuit priest, Anthony De Mello, tells this story at the beginning of his book “Awareness”. He uses it to send home his message that in order to live a spiritual life one must first WAKE UP to your need for more meaning in your life. Now this is your first wake-up call that Advent, the beginning of a new church year is

just two weeks away. Advent is a time to wake up to the reality of God's promised coming into our lives.

The Gospel passage today is just such a wake-up call. In this 3rd year of the biblical cycle of readings from the Gospel according to Luke we've mostly been reading and thinking about Jesus' parables. But now this morning's reading jumps from telling the story of the widow who came to the temple regularly to give what little she had to support the temple, to Jesus' prediction that it would not be long until the temple would be destroyed.

This passage toward the end of Luke's Gospel has been called a "little apocalypse," designed to capture the imagination of his followers and startle them into wakefulness. Certainly the prediction of the temple's destruction would get their attention, probably more than, I'm sure, than it does when we read about it now.

But Jesus question to his followers then, is a big one for us today. It sounds brutal to say this, but in a world so saturated by instant communication these days what indeed really startles us anymore? Jesus' might well be asking the very contemporary question, "Will you be awake or asleep—when the end of our religious culture comes down right in front of us?"

It has been said that the church today is just one generation short of extinction. Will you be like Washington Irving's character Rip Van Winkle, who slept through 20 years, straight through the American Revolution, or do you come prepared for whatever difficulties that come, with a knowledge of God's love and care, that will give you hope and stamina to endure times of tribulation? Or do you come as people who have postponed knowing God, saying like Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With The Wind" did with her famous exit line, "I'll think about that tomorrow."

In other words, do you come as casual or nominal people of faith or do you come with commitment and trust?

These are very real questions, not just "preacher talk" to keep your attention. If you think about it, there is no other resource most people can think about that can connect you to an opportunity for personal renewal and refreshment that is more available to you than your parish church.

That is why I keep referring to the "seekers and searchers" in what I write, and preach about all the time. In our day in and day out routine of our lives are we awake to what's available for us here, so that it will be truly availing in our lives?

In fact, let me ask you: are you satisfied with your life? In a suburban congregation somewhat the size of ours, a recent survey showed that 69% of the people who responded to a questionnaire indicated a desire to hear more about spiritual disciplines.

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Responding to that need and desire has been a fundamental goal for our new Sunday morning schedule this fall and is the foundational goal underlying our stewardship theme this month: “Joyfully Thanking Our Generous God.”

I was reminded about all of that by an outdoor signboard I saw some time ago in front of Christ Church, Easton Md. whose words have stayed with me: “Is Prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?”

That sign got me to thinking. Where is the church in our lives? Is it the steering wheel of prayer we rely on to keep our focus and direction, or is it just another spare tire you want to keep supporting for emergencies? Is your church pledge a guide as you measure the priorities in your life, or is it something you just squeeze into a budget full already full from other choices? Is your pledge just another “fixed expense” in your budget, or is it a

resource to express and increase YOUR “joyfully thanking our generous God”!!

These, my friends, are honest-to-God questions and real opportunities for you as you consider what is good for your life, and what is worth investing in for all those who will follow after us. Remember “a saint is someone who plants trees for generations he will never see.”

What will it be for you? God will not force you to wake up to a reality and possibility for the kind of life that is offered for you every Sunday you walk in the doors to St. James’. But you can, if you will, make it a time when you get out of bed and discover that you’re forty-five, or twenty-one, or seventy-four, and that you’ve got things to do today, which even in the worst of times can be the best you can offer to the God who is with us yesterday, today, and forever!

AMEN