

Worship 21.11.14

Psalm 16: 8-11

I keep the Faithful One always before me;
because she is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
Even my body resides in safety.
For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Mark 13: 24-37

‘But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

‘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. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Sermon:

It was late - way, way past my bedtime, when, as I was cruising down route 30 on the eastern edge of Lancaster county, one night, I saw the flashing lights in my rear view mirror. I slowly pulled over, bumping over the rumble strips on the edge of the highway.

The police officer told me they'd received 3 calls reporting an erratic driver. Me.

I was about 15 miles from home, and trying to power through my fatigue to get to my bed. Little did I know how dangerous I was.

After determining that it was tiredness and not something illegal in my system, I was let go. Now fully awake.

Wake up. Beware. Be aware. Be awake. Keep awake. 6 times in Mark chapter 13 we hear this command.

It begins, early in the chapter, when Jesus tells Peter, James, John and Andrew, who come asking "tell us, when will this be, meaning the destruction of the temple, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to happen?" (Mark 13:4)

Jesus response: "Beware that no one leads you astray"

The operative word throughout the 13th chapter of Mark is "Watch out." Jesus' command to his disciples is the same to those in the parable at the end of our reading today; Stay awake!

At the "Reawaken America" conference in San Antonio Texas earlier this month, Michael Flynn, former security advisor to President Trump, spoke to this conservative Christian gathering saying: "If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion. One nation under God, and one religion under God."¹

Reawaken America. Be aware. My friends: Stay awake, so no one leads you astray...

This statement of Mr. Flynn flies in the face of our Constitution, writes historian Heather Cox Richardson, who reminds us that our First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

¹ [Heather Cox Richardson](#)

Be aware. Keep alert.

In 1772, at the age of 21, James Madison, one of the key thinkers behind the Constitution, was deeply impacted as he watched his home state of Virginia arrest itinerant preachers for attacking the established church in his state. It caused him to question whether established religion, which was common in the colonies, was good for society.²

Several of us have been studying Anabaptist history, reading this week about the ways the early Anabaptists were persecuted for going against the church and state of their time.

Be aware. Beware. Keep awake.

We are here, in the 13th chapter of Mark. The line that follows our gospel reading today is: “It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him” (Mark 14: 1)

Imagine the tension that must have been swirling around that community!

We have spent much of the last year mining the gospel of Mark. Next Sunday begins Advent, the beginning of a new year in the church, where we will move into the stories from another gospel.

So one more look at Mark’s gospel.

This gospel is not a gospel to turn to to help you feel safe and secure in the world, or to get your balance. This gospel is one where the good news asks up to continually bear witness; that following Jesus asks everything of us. This gospel is about new possibilities in a chaotic world.

New possibilities in a chaotic world. These words are for us my friends!

This earliest of our gospels was written during a time of great confusion and distress - around year 70.

² IBID.

The disciples, now decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, likely were asking - Where is Jesus? When is he coming back? Where is God in all of this?

Our passage this morning speaks to these questions, these fears. We're listening in here to an intimate conversation between Jesus and 4 of his closest disciples. It's a teaching for his followers, not the crowds.

Out of their anxiety, the disciples want reassurance, they want answers. But Jesus says - it's not about figuring out dates...

His warnings are not meant to be a blueprint, writes theology professor, Michael Kiel. He suggests they might be directed to a complacent community- reminding them that God is up to stuff that may be beyond human knowledge, and the community's job is simply to stay awake for it. It functions like a rumble strip on the side of a highway, meant to jar the community awake as it nods off and drifts toward the ditch.³

That insight really struck me - hear it again:

Jesus' warnings...might be directed to a complacent community suggesting that God is up to stuff that may be beyond human understanding, and the community's job is simply to stay awake for it.

Last Sunday, November 14, was the 61st anniversary of the day Ruby Bridges, that courageous 6 year old African American little girl, walked into William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, flanked by four federal marshals, as onlookers shouted slurs and threats.⁴ For the rest of the school year, Ruby was the only student in that classroom, the other students, all white, had been withdrawn from class by their parents. Bridges and her teacher worked together alone for the rest of the school year. And within a week, nearly all of the white students assigned to the newly-integrated elementary schools in New Orleans had withdrawn.

We know the progression of that story, but the Bridges' didn't know what lay ahead.

³ Keil, Michael. [Working Preacher](#).

⁴ [Learn about Ruby Bridges](#)

They suffered for their actions. Ruby Bridges' parents lost their jobs, and her grandparents were forced to move off their farm. They weren't even served at their local grocery store. This "white mob" that protested against her inclusion in school was made up of neighbors, community members and colleagues.

Today, decades later, white parents with similar mentalities are rallying to remove Ruby Bridges' story from their children's curriculum.⁵

Ruby Bridges, now 67 years old, continues to work tirelessly for justice. She's one of the metaphorical rumble strips, shaking those of us who might be complacent in our faith and actions to stay awake! In a recent talk, she said: "If you leave out part of the truth, you're not telling the full story. You need the truth, because the truth is a guide for where you need to go"⁶

If you leave out part of the truth, you're not telling the full story.

We must not only hear these stories, but be keepers of these stories, and make sure they are heard. We must spread the good news - telling the fullness of our stories, even when they are hard to tell and hard to hear.

Jesus has no answers for the questions that surround his anxious disciples. He just drills into them the message - you, my closest companions, you need to stay alert, awake, watchful.

Paying attention, staying awake to the needs and pain of those around us can take form in so many ways. It might be whispering a prayer to God in the quiet of the night, it might be dropping a note, making a phone call.

But being awake begins inside of us.

Waking up begins here (point to chest).

⁵ [MSNBC.](#)

⁶ [South Bend Tribune](#)

We often think of problems being 'out there' - externalizing the problem, making it about someone else's need to change.

I was stopped in my tracks this week when I read this line: "No action that is driven by our discomfort will solve anything"...it's only when actions come from a place of love that transformation happens.⁷

In our gospel today, Jesus has no answers, but a call to action: Be aware. Keep awake.

Mark's gospel calls us to wake up, to live out our discipleship. Discipleship not rooted in fear, but in love.

Jesus' response to his disciples is harsh, confusing, hard for us, centuries later to understand. Can we allow them to jar us awake as we, from time to time, nod off?

Wake us up to the continual work of loving; loving and caring for ourselves and this messy world?

I listened to a new podcast this week named "My Unsung Hero" - it's short stories of ordinary people, who, often through small actions, made a lasting impact on someone.

In 2018, just before Christmas, Terri Powers' mom died. A few days later she went to the grocery store, and when the checker asked that innocuous question "How are you?" Terri just couldn't brush it off, and said 'Honestly, I'm not doing great, my mom just died.' The woman checking her out said something kind and the exchange ended. As Terri turned to pick up her bag, the young man who bagged her groceries looked her straight in the eye and said, can I give you a hug? Terri said yes, and they hugged. Just a hug. But, it wasn't 'just a hug' she said. This man had stood there, listened, and then reacted, giving her the one thing, that expression of comfort and caring, she needed. It made such a difference for her that day. She wishes now, nearly 3 years later, that she could say 'thank you'. Thank you for making a difference with that simple, powerful gesture.⁸

Waking up. Being present with our fears, our anxieties, and choosing another way. Choosing the way of Christ.

⁷ Rinpoche, Tenzin Wangyal. 2011. *Awakening the Sacred Body*. Hay House Publishing.

⁸ "My Unsung Hero" is heard on Hidden Brain. November 12, 2021.

We are not called to be a people who live in fear. No, Jesus came proclaiming life. He is the light found in the darkness. These words of Jesus are part of the good news. They call us to the fullness of life.

My friends, in this chaotic world, what are the rumble strips that shake you awake?

Let us follow the guide of Christ - the one who holds the fullness of truth and beckons us to wake up. To wake up to love.