

**A GREAT DAY FOR UP
JULY 20 AND 21, 2018**

MATTHEW 24: 2-8, 26, 42-44; ROMANS 13: 11-12

We all know people who are “morning people”. You know, those ones who are bright and cheery, up at daybreak --- come on everyone ... up, up ... It’s a great day! And they haven’t even had their first cup of coffee.

And then there are the last page of the book people
Please go away.
No UP.
I’m sleeping in today.

You know which one you are, and I sure know which I am. There’s not enough coffee in the world to get me to rise and “shine.”

I do get up every day, by the grace of God, I just don’t always “shine”. And if I do sleep in, then I agonize over the realization that I’ve stolen time away from things that need to be done. I want to sleep, but I also want to wake up and get the day started. I’m sort of in that in between state.

In both of the Scripture readings for today, we’re being encouraged to wake up! Paul writes to his Roman readers “You know what time it is, it’s time for you to wake up from your sleep.”

Paul had a vision. He saw a world in need of Jesus. But, the church at Rome found itself in a city where power, status and discrimination had everything to do with who was in and who was out. It was a place where being a Christian simply wasn’t the “thing to do.”

Signing up for a Christian journey in Rome meant a life of ridicule, second-class citizenship and exile from family members. It was a very brave choice.

Paul fears that for many who had made this choice, were just going through the motions of worship. He fears they no longer had their eyes or ears open to the power of what God could do in their midst. He feared they’d lost their spiritual excitement; their excitement over following the ways of Jesus.

So, in response, Paul has one clear message to share with them. It was time to wake-up.

Up! Up! It’s time to wake up from your sleep!

As I was studying today’s Scripture to prepare for the message, I found the word Paul uses in the Greek for “sleep” is the same word from which we get the English word "hypnosis" - one that means "to be drowsy". Paul is basically telling the Roman Christians they’re starting to nod off into a spiritual "slumber.”

It’s a great day to wake UP, except they didn’t want to be bothered.

A familiar story in American folklore is Rip Van Winkle. Set in colonial America, it’s the story of a man who lives in a

small village at the foot of the Catskills. One day, Rip wanders into the mountains with his dog and runs into a group of strange Dutchmen. Rip enjoys a drink with the men and then falls asleep for 20 years. As you can imagine, when he wakes up, he discovers some shocking changes. His dog was gone, his beard had grown incredibly long, his house is in complete disrepair, his wife and children are gone, and there is no one living in town that he recognized.

I've read that Martin Luther King, Jr. loved the story of Rip Van Winkle. King liked to say, "The thing we usually remember about the story is that Rip slept for twenty years, but there's another point which is almost always completely overlooked. When Rip went up the mountain, a sign in the local tavern had a picture of King George III and when he came down it had a picture of George Washington. The most striking thing about the story is not that Rip slept twenty years, but that he slept through a revolution. There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution."

I don't know about you, but I could use a long nap from all the mess in our country and in our world today – an opportunity to escape. Twenty years sounds about right. Yet, both Paul and Jesus warn us: we must resist this temptation.

Jesus said: "Stay awake, keep watch, pay attention, and be vigilant." "You do not know on what day your Lord will come. But, be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

For centuries, Christians have been fascinated with this chapter in the Gospel of Matthew "Signs of the End of the Age." Unfortunately our fascination with the signs have been coupled with a preoccupation for predicting when the world will end. In his book, The Late Great Planet Earth, Hal Lindsay said the world would end in the 80's and the book sold 28 million copies. We're still here.

End-time speculation was at its height as we approached the year 2000 – remember the best-selling Left Behind series that told us what the end would be like? We're still here.

Harold Camping predicted the world would end six different times, but his miscalculations didn't prevent people from following him and contributing over 80 million dollars to his organization in 2011. We're still here.

Sadly, our preoccupation with the end of the world has often led Christians to disregard the present, and ironically has allowed and is continuing to allow many people to sleep through the Jesus revolution that has been and is happening in the present. Jesus' mission on earth was to teach us how to live in the present kingdom while we wait for God's eternal kingdom reign. One clear detail Jesus taught his followers about his return is that no one will know when that will be.

Jesus came and turned the world upside down, or right-side up, whichever way you want to look at it, and then

filled us with His Spirit so until that time, we continue His kingdom work in the here and now.

The world is trying to lull us into a deep sleep, to keep the status quo, to prevent a Jesus revolution from happening. The world would love nothing more than for us to sleepwalk through life.

Staying awake is hard. It's disorienting and it's often painful. Staying awake, as Jesus suggests, is even more difficult because when we wake up to the truth of the cold hard world we live in, we don't often like what we see and we want to crawl back under those nice warm sheets and pull the covers over our eyes.

Staying awake can be physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting. But, we have extraordinary work to do to get ready for the reign of God to come.

We've been charged with the work of love, peace, mercy, and justice; we've been charged with the responsibility of sharing the Good News of the Gospel with the world; and we can't do the work we've been called to do, if we're asleep.

As I was gathering thoughts and creating this message, I could imagine Paul penning his words "to stay awake" with all the strength and conviction he could muster—thinking about how the church at Rome had everything they needed to be the people of God. They'd been baptized, they knew the teachings of Jesus and they had the Holy Spirit to be their constant guide.

But they had no urgency. They lacked courage. They lacked bravery. They'd forgotten how to articulate why they were doing what they were doing in the first place. It was as if Paul was looking them directly in the face and saying, "Church: See! Believe and Do! The time is now to wake up."

It should be humbling to think that right now, we who are Jesus' followers, we who form communities called the church, are called to be the living body and presence of Jesus in the world right now!

So, church, it's time to wake up!

We can't be Christ's presence to the hurting, the homeless, the hungry, the lonely, the abandoned, the grieving with our head under the covers or buried in the sand. There's a lot that's wrong in the world.

But Jesus invites us to live with our eyes wide open, to be aware, to know what is going on around us, and to do our part to advance the Kingdom of God on earth. It's time to wake up to a vision of a just world and to wake up to our call to participate in its realization.

It's a great day to wake up!

Let us pray:

Gracious God, too often we drift through life asleep, unaware, unconcerned. We get so caught up in our own agendas, our own problems, our own lives. Help us to wake up so that we don't miss the adventure of life you want for us. Help us to dream of a just world and have the courage to do our small part to advance your kingdom on earth. Give us the discernment to see your presence in others, and help us to be the body of Christ right here, right now. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.