

**Wesley United Methodist Church**

August 11, 2019

“Blessed Are Those Who Are Awake.”

Luke 12:35-40

Mark Twain once said that he heard a preacher who was powerfully good. He decided to give him every cent he had with him. But the preacher kept at it too long. Ten minutes later, Twain decided to keep the bills and only give him the change. Another ten minutes more Twain said, “I was darned if I’d give him anything at all. Then, when he finally stopped and the plate came around, I was so exhausted, I decided to steal \$2 just for spite.” That’s why we take up the offering before the sermon.

Now I know you sympathize with Mark Twain. I don’t hear preachers on a regular basis the way you do, but I understand that sympathy. I have to listen to myself every week.

One of my problems of sermon preparation is how much to cover. When you come to a passage like the one we are looking at this morning, how do you narrow the focus? I have to remind myself that there will be other Sundays for me and for you, and other preachers to deal with this text. Above all, I have to trust you and the text to the Holy Spirit and pray that the message will be the catalyst to arouse your curiosity, stir your thinking, and prod you to deal with the text on your own. I also have to be aware that there is certain truth in the text.

So, that’s the way I arrived at the title today: “Blessed are Those Who are Awake.”

I state that as a Beatitude of Jesus. We don’t find it with the other blessings in the Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus is giving a blessing: “Blessed Are Those whom the Master finds awake.” Blessed are those who stay awake, alert, ready for what life presents them—to be awake in order to be responsive and responsible to all the unexpected visitations or calls and opportunities and relationships.

I’m not ignoring the fact that Jesus is teaching about the second coming. There is praise here for the servant who is ready when the Lord returns, and He is going to return. We don’t know when or how, but you can’t read the New Testament faithfully and miss that message.

The truth Jesus teaches us about the Second Coming is that it is certain, but we don’t know the timing. So, his call is to stay awake. To Be ready. He makes his case in the language of his day. “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.” What he is saying, stay awake—stay alive, alert.

We need to stay awake because we never know when we are going to be surprised by new possibilities. Most of us have lived long enough to know the unexpected will happen—we can count on it. I’ve certainly found it so in my own life. But, isn’t that the way life works? We need to stay awake, because we never know when we are going to be surprised by some new possibilities.

So, don’t settle down. Don’t allow yourself to become dull and drowsy. Don’t allow those feelings of being trapped or cornered prevail. Don’t be seduced by the thoughts that you don’t have any options. God is alive and working the world and when God is alive there are always new possibilities. Our God is a God who says through the prophet Isaiah, “Behold I am doing a new thing.” And through his Son Jesus, “Behold, I make all things new.”

Now the other side of that coin is that we never know when something important is going to be taken from us. Do you see the connection?

Whether it’s the opening of a door, or the closing of a door, the demand is that we stay awake. Bishop Peter Story from South Africa tells a story of three men in town for a convention. They were assigned rooms on the 51<sup>st</sup> floor of the convention hotel. When they came in, the elevator was out of order.

It was a terrible dilemma, but they had no alternative. Being creative, they decided that they would devise a way to make that climb bearable.

For 17 stories—as they climbed the stairs—they would tell funny stories. Then, for the next 17 stories, they would tell scary stories. Then, for the final 17 stories, they would tell sad stories. Well, it did work. For 17 stories, they laughed as they told funny story after another taking their minds off of their climb. Then, for the next 17 stories there were the scary tales—and that helped because it seemed to energize them. Then as they began the last trek—up the steps of the last 17 stories—they began to tell sad story after sad story. When they got to the 50<sup>th</sup> floor, they had run out of stories. No one spoke up. Then it happened. One fellow broke the silence, “Fellows, here is the saddest story of all. I forgot the key at the reception desk.”

The key—whether a door is being opened, or a door is being closed; the key is that we stay awake. Because we never know when we are going to be surprised by a new possibility; nor, do we ever know when something important is being taken from us.

Let me share one more thing in closing--our relationships with each other.

Time is fleeting, and we never know what's going to happen to any of us—we need to stay awake in relationships—to be caring, affirming, attentive—investing ourselves in family, in love, in ministry, because we never know when something important is going to be taken from us.

I want to share with you a little of what I have learned the last eight years, the high-water mark of my experience as a human being. Two things are closest to my heart now: love and death. You have known that our daughter, Erika, died of skin cancer in September 2011. From that experience I have learned this:

Never be embarrassed to talk about hallowed things like love and death.

I realize that we are a bit finicky about those. There is very little serious talk about love, and as for death, we hide from it... It is as natural as birth and we need to face it. We need to express our love to one another and share how we feel. We need to accept death, no matter how bad it hurt.

Doesn't that make sense? We need to stay awake, because we never know when something important is going to be given or taken from us. So, Jesus gives us a wonderful benediction—a beatitude that we need to hear—  
“Blessed are those who stay awake.”