

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Aug 27th 2015

Stay awake' or else!

Recently I walked a New England cemetery, in the north east of the United States. It dated back to the 1660's. Dusty, weedy pathways squiggled among over 2,000 graves. Some headstones stood straight and tall. Others slumped. More were scarred or fractured. Others, no longer able to stand, were concealed in the overgrowth.

I found comfort in reading this old cemetery. I awakened again to my mortality, my vulnerability and the fragility of life. Each marker offered a glimpse into a life. Soldiers and sailors from all of our country's military battles rest here. Young women who died in childbirth rest here. Infants, children, even siblings, who died long before their parents, rest here. Seafarers lost at sea are remembered here. The young, the old, widows and widowers, the trusted and the shiftless rest here side by side. Nathaniel, a surviving twin who lived only days, rests near Phoebe who lived to be 97. Names, but no faces. There was no rhyme or reason, no recognizable pattern to the lives and deaths. It doesn't take much to imagine the sorrows, joys and challenges buried here.

Did they 'stay awake'? 'Ready' the day the Lord came? 'Faithful and prudent servant(s)'?

"Stay awake". Matthew does not paint a pretty picture of what it might be like not to be awake and prepared, prudent and faithful.

The last three days we have also been hearing Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul's letter has a gentle, kinder tone. Paul says, "because you have become very dear to us...we want to share... not only the gospel of God but also our own selves...". We are "...gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children.... as a father treats his children exhorting and encouraging you insisting that you walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you...". Paul offers the gospel, the person of Jesus. Paul wants the people of Thessalonica to receive, to want the gift they bring. Paul wants them to know and to recognize Jesus.

I desire to 'stay awake'. I want to be alert, notice, be aware of God's presence in and around me – all the time, not just in preparation for the fateful hour. I desire to be awake. I desire to be a living member of the faithful community, alert to the constant enfolding, expanding, challenging presence of God. God desires me to live in faithful relationship, not as a gambler betting on the when and where of the Lord's arrival, the final hour. I want to recognize Jesus.

"Stay awake" or else! Or else what? Or else, I may miss something beautiful, amazing, or unexpected. I may not recognize Jesus who stands near me. I may miss the Lord's gentleness in the young mother taking her anxious child to the first day of school. Or the face of Compassion on the nurse caring for the dying man. Or Christ's longing in the eyes of a homeless child. I may miss the Jesus of peace and justice in the dedicated, diligent arbitrator. I may miss the jovial Jesus in the wedding celebration. I may miss the every-day-God of love, laughter, friendship, joy, peace and comfort. I may miss hearing the Lord calling my name revealing Love and/or gently revealing my brokenness. Now that I am awake, at least for the moment – I see, I hear the Lord's work among us. I experience God's laboring in me!

As I pause among the headstones I am reminded of the love and the mercy of the Lord.

The good-news: The every-day-God dwells among us.

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