

Keeping Awake, Being Open to Possibilities

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, November 30, 2017.

1 Thessalonians 5: 6-11 and Mark 13:33-37

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

I am not a morning person. When the alarm wakes me, I can just about drag myself out of bed. I usually lay there for another fifteen minutes, either recalling the dream from which I'd just been stirred or indulging in fantasies. Once I'm up, I'm not fully up. Yes, my body gets active. I shower. I dress (a workout in and of itself). I rush to get out the door and to work on time. Yet a mental fog lingers through the duration of the morning; not even a large cup of coffee can dissipate it. Only by noon do I feel alert, and then waste that energy fretting over how it might have seen me further through a project if I'd had it in those morning hours too.

Going through the day, or a portion of the day, like a sleepwalker is not healthy. Twice Jesus tells us in tonight's Gospel reading to "keep awake" (three times if you count his variant, "keep alert"). Paul echoes this advice in his first letter to the Thessalonians, with an added admonition to "be sober."

What exactly is that for which we are to keep awake and sober? Is it an event that will shake the entire universe and herald Jesus' second coming? Is it something else? It's hard to pinpoint. There are many interpretations of Mark's thirteenth chapter, including of the parable we just heard Jesus tell about the journeying man who charges his servants with the task of keeping watch while he's away. Even if we're not entirely clear on *why* we're to keep watch, there's a degree of urgency to this directive.

If we look at ourselves and at our world right now in this moment, we know we've been living on high alert. Mass shootings. Sexual violence. The threat of nuclear war. It's all sobering enough to make us want to bury our heads in the proverbial sand and pretend the heat out there doesn't exist. We'd rather wrap ourselves inside a cocoon of memories about simpler times or daydreams about brighter days to come.

Advent, which begins this weekend, is a reminder not just that better days are ahead, but that they're also here with us right now in the waiting, in the

pregnant pause before the dawn. God is the "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) and is very real, present, and at work developing new life and new possibilities for us. Keeping awake means being open to those possibilities that God is forming. It also means playing our part in helping to bring those possibilities to fruition. Choose to snooze or sleepwalk through life and we'll lose out on some very real opportunities to encounter a living and present God, one who manifests their self in each person and situation we face.

So keep awake, friends, and keep watch. Don't wait passively. Be active and open to the present that is the Presence. The hour is now. Are we ready?