

KEEP AWAKE
[written in oral form]

Mark 13:32-37
Memorial Sunday

Gordon Allaby
November 26, 2017

This Sunday is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, and we've designated it as our memorial Sunday. Next Sunday begins a new year and the season of Advent.

It is fitting to have memorial Sunday today.
We are bearing a heavy weight of grief.

If that is not enough to pull us down, we also feel the load of disconcerting world events,...with refugees in peril, murder in mosques and churches,.... increasing bigotry, global warming...and the rumble of war drums.

~~~~~

Today's text presents Jesus' strong warning .....as the swirl of dark and desperate times gather into a tempest.

~~~~~

We did not read the preceding verses, but it is helpful to understand the context of our passage. The topic is eschatology, and Jesus is referring to the parousia.

~~~~~

Wow,.....I think this is the first time that I have spoken those words since seminary.

Parousia is Greek, and it literally means "presence after absence."  
In the theological domain, we understand it as meaning the "Second Coming of Christ."

Eschatology means, "last things"; referring to the end of time.  
Jesus said, in verse 32, that no one, absolutely no one except God knows when the end will happen. This is personal,.....and universal in scope.

~~~~~

So, there is no need to read tea leaves.....or speculate about apocalyptic meaning in catastrophes or political upheaval.

I have often referred to this verse, when I hear people making predictions.

~~~~~

Jesus then emphatically states "Beware" / take heed..... AND...  
KEEP ALERT / keep watch.

His declaration is in the present imperative tense,.... meaning it's a strong command, emphasizing the NOW.

It is a warning to be in constant expectation and alertness.

Jesus was saying, Live in expectant hope of the sovereign triumph of God!

~~~~~

In verse 34, Jesus began a brief illustration by again repeating the warning, "Watch/ Keep Awake!"

~~~~~

I'll translate his illustration for our present day.

When parents go away for the weekend, their teenage children should realize that they really don't know when their parents will return.

The parents could easily come home early. They could come home at anytime,..... so.....be careful.....think again about that party.

~~~~~  
The text closes with Jesus again repeating his warning,
KEEP AWAKE.

~~~~~  
Okay. We get the point, Keep awake. YET....what exactly does this mean? What are we suppose to be doing?

Should we sit and stare at the heavens in anxious anticipation?  
It's been 2,000 years,.....so that approach sure doesn't make sense.  
So,....What are we suppose to be doing?

~~~~~  
??????????

The Gospel of Mark is a well written book, and I think the following verses help answer the question about what **being awake** means.

~~~~~  
The next episode is about Jesus being anointed with oil, and this anointing confirms that Jesus is pretty important..... very important.

Next is Judas making plans to betray Jesus.  
Lesson here: don't put self interests first and don't reject Jesus because Jesus is more important.  
In addition, arranging and/or participating in killing is Not a good thing.

Judas' plotting is followed by the Passover meal with the disciples, which included the enduring ritual to prompt us to remember Jesus.  
I'll say more on this in a moment.

Jesus then foretold Peter's denial of Jesus.  
Lesson: we'll have regret if we put our own interests first,....because it is denying the critical primacy and importance of Jesus.

Finally, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus again stated, three more times, "Keep Awake". He said "keep awake" too the sleepy disciples, who failed to appreciate what was going on/ what was passing them by.

~~~~~  
Keeping awake includes knowing Jesus: what Jesus taught and Jesus' life example.
However, this is not head knowledge. It's not learning the rules to pass a classroom test. Actually, The test is life itself.

~~~~~  
In faith, we accept that God sent Jesus to give us / everyone life--true life / an abundant life.  
Jesus showed us what that life looks like, and he taught how to live it.  
It's a life based on love, peace, hope and grace.

And, it certainly is NOT about putting ourselves first,...or doing destruction.... or denying Jesus.....or.....being numb and unaware.

~~~~~

To better understand this, simply reread the Sermon on the Mount,... or... better.....regularly read the Gospels.

~~~~~

Being awake is about living. It's about living NOW..in the present.

It's good to recall and remember ...in order to enhance the present / the now. Yet too often, we hide in the past.....in old memories, and in essence become asleep to what is unfolding around us in the moment.

This is also true about obsessing and worrying about the future. Such anxious speculation will make us numb and dull.

Living / being awake is applying the life giving Jesus lessons NOW.

~~~~~

The Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh teaches this wisdom through the ceremony and meditation of tea (which is a Buddhist parallel to the Christian Eucharist):

He states:

"You must be completely awake in the present to enjoy the tea.

Only in the awareness of the present, can your hands feel the pleasant warmth of the cup.

Only in the present, can you savor the aroma, taste the sweetness, appreciate the delicacy.

If you are ruminating about the past, or worrying about the future, you will completely miss the experience of enjoying the cup of tea.

You will look down at the cup, and the tea will be gone.

Life is like that.

If you are not fully present, you will look around and it will be gone.

You will have missed the feel, the aroma, the delicacy and beauty of life. It will seem to be speeding past you.

The past is finished.

Learn from it and let it go.

The future is not even here yet.

Plan for it, but do not waste your time worrying about it.

Worrying is worthless.

When you stop ruminating about what has already happened, when you stop worrying about what might never happen, then you will be in the present moment.

Then you will begin to experience joy in life."

~~~~~

That image of drinking a cup of tea, really hit me.

I'm a coffee drinker,.....but truth be told,.....I can't remember the last time that I savoured a cup of coffee / when I was focussed and mindful of it.  
I drink coffee as I work, or read the news or chat with others.

Come to think of it,.....much of what I do is a blend and blur.  
I hope to change that bad habit of mine.

I think multi-tasking, including cell phone use, clouds our consciousness.  
In my busyness.....I have missed a lot,.....in other words, I was NOT alert.....I was NOT AWAKE.

~~~~~

Being Awake / alert is being present in the now...
It is savouring each moment, regardless of what is going on. It is being With each person because we don't know what tomorrow brings.

Moreover, the lessons and life of Jesus can keep us from the numbing effects of selfishness, fear and destruction.

Jesus taught, Grace and love will wake us up and keep us alert.

~~~~~

~~~~~

I think it's prudent to be informed about what is going on, yet being consumed by the news.... and worrying about the future will make us dull.
So, counterbalance the bleakness with grace and love,.....and by looking for Christ.
Christ is the redeeming gracious love of God.

I'm not suggesting staring up into the heavens,.....but rather, look / sense life-giving goodness all around.
Look for Christ in all things,.....and don't be fooled by the superficial or by labels.
You may find Christ wearing a hijab..... or asking for loose change.

~~~~~

May we be awake / alert.....living in the now, and Not miss a thing.

~~~~~

In a few moments, we will remember those who are no longer with us/ those who have died.

It is okay to caress our sorrows. Grieving is necessary, and it's natural way of letting go of the past.
It is good to remember, as long as we also remember where we are.

WE are Here Now,so may the past memories nurture and enhance the present.
May we always celebrate life,.....love and grace.
And, we may we be as a candle that breaks the darkness.
May we be ever awake and alert.

~~~~~