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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
23rd Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 27/Year A
November 12, 2017 Matthew 25:1-13

Keep Awake

We are just about mid-November and fast approaching the end of the liturgical year. The season of Advent is just beyond the horizon and we are beginning to hear verses that say “...when he comes again...”, and “*that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord*”, and “*Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*”

As I pondered today's Gospel and Jesus' proclamation of “*keep awake*”, I couldn't help but think back to my junior year at Webster University. I had gotten a role in the student production of “Animal Farm” and rehearsals were going fairly well. Stage blocking was just about complete and the directive finally came from on high: we were to know all of our lines by a certain day within the next three weeks. No exceptions! I was well on my way to having all my lines memorized but there were other interruptions at that time as I was also heavily immersed in my dance classes at SIU East St. Louis. It didn't help that during this time my family was preparing to make a short trip to visit relatives over the school break. No problem, I thought. I'll go over my lines in the car. No such thing happened. I enjoyed the visits and outings with cousins so maybe once did I go over my lines the entire time. No problem, I thought again. I will get to the rest on the drive back. I don't know what happened but the majority of memorized lines had not stuck. I had not retained them. I would not be ready for rehearsals that were only two days away. I needed more time! I began to panic! I felt doomed! But God had a sense of humor though the director was not laughing. And really, neither was I. The evening before rehearsal, I had gone to dance class and slipped and fallen on the slick floor in the dance studio. I had twisted not one but both ankles and showed up to rehearsal the next day on crutches. Needless to say, I was quickly replaced. For the longest time I felt sorry for the student who had to replace me at the last minute. I guess I got off the hook because no one knew that I wasn't ready. That I hadn't focused. That I hadn't, in a sense, stayed awake! But you'd better believe that I never left memorizing my lines to chance at the last moment ever again.

The parable of the bridesmaids clearly mirrors that awful feeling of panic and doom, of not being prepared, of not being ready. Of the possibility of being

locked out or being left out in the cold. Of facing consequences of actions or inactions.

Jesus' disciples certainly had cause to think about such things as Jesus had already begun speaking to them in earnest about the nearness of God's kingdom and of his own coming again in great glory. In the previous chapter before today's pericope, they had asked Jesus to help them understand the signs of the last days and of his return. They said him, "*Tell us, when will this be (the tearing down of the temple), and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*" Throughout Chapter 24, Jesus gives them description after description of things that will occur before his second coming. He tells them that before he comes again there would be terrible signs and omens, rumors and false messiahs who will rise to point that the end is near.

In today's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples a parable about ten bridesmaids had been given a role to play in a wedding. They were to wait for the bridegroom to show up so that they could light the way to the wedding party. They all waited and waited but when the groom had not come they began to grow weary and went to sleep. Finally they were awakened by a commotion. The bridegroom had arrived but five of them did not have enough oil in their lamps to light the way. They were not prepared! They left in search of extra oil and came back to a locked door. And instead of being warmly welcomed into the banquet, they heard the words, "*I do not know you.*" And Jesus ends his story with ominous words, "*Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*"

It is two thousand years later and we are still hearing preachers and others speak in earnest of the end times. Even some of us, if we haven't already, acknowledge seemingly worsening signs-earthquakes, famines, nations rising against nations. And even more frightening are the words that Jesus speaks of in Chapter 24, verse 12: "*And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.*" The increase of lawlessness. We see it. We see it as people are more openly and frequently spewing words and acts of hate. We hear of it as violence and acts of terror are reported again and again. As people's lives are cut down too soon. Think of the innocent lives taken last Sunday in a small church in Sutherland Springs, TX. Think of Las Vegas. Manhattan. Denver. Just to name a few. Then we hear the words in scripture. Words of warning, judgement, and consequences. We also hear words that speak of repentance, waiting, preparation, and readiness. And we hear Jesus' words today: "*Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*"

But it isn't all doom and gloom that we are to hear but also words of encouragement. *Keep awake. Be ready. Be alert.* For God has already shown up. The kingdom of heaven is here.

Yes, we are to *keep awake*. Keep awake so that we can fully participate in God's kingdom that is here and not yet. Keep awake so that we are spiritually ready just as we ready ourselves for so many other things. It is so easy for other things to hold our attention. We are busy people. Addicted to our electronic toys and other things. We are preoccupied. One preacher commented: "...we tend to make our way through life sleepwalking...Like all of the bridesmaids, we let that part (the spiritual part) of our life wait. There will be time for that later, we say to ourselves."* How often have we done that, waited? Only to find that we didn't really have all the time we thought?

Sisters and brothers, we are to open our eyes. God has already shown up. The kingdom of heaven is here. It is not meant for us to live in fear and trepidation. We are to live, truly live, in faith and in hope and in peace NOW.

In Tuesday evening's Bible study, we surmised that it would be hard to imagine Jesus closing the door to anyone because we know that he welcomed tax collectors and all manner of sinner. Still, his directive is clear.

We are to *keep awake* lest we miss seeing the presence of Christ Jesus and God's kingdom here and now. We are to *keep awake* lest we miss out on the many blessings and opportunities God presents to us in abundance day after day. We are to *keep awake* in order to serve and see the face of Christ in our sister and our brother. We are to *keep awake* so that we can be part of the good that we do see around us.

Keep awake! Amen!

*taken from the Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek's sermon, "Awakening to God's presence," for 22 Pentecost, Proper 27, 2014.