

“WAKE UP!”

The Reverend Dr. Robert M. Zanicky

December 2, 2007

1st Presbyterian Church

Wilkes-Barre, PA

Matthew 24:36-44

Romans 13:11-14

“Wake up,” mother gently nudged her young son. Minutes later, “Wake up,” mother’s voice, slightly increasing in volume. Several minutes later, “It’s time to wake up!” mother’s voice much more forceful. Still no stirring. Finally, mother worried and frustrated, “It’s time to wake up! Bobby, you must get up for school! The bus will be here very soon! Bobby! Bobby! Will I have to tell your dad about this?” Whereupon, Bobby jumps out of bed and is dressed in minutes – ready for school.

I know that my mother and I had numerous (multiple) morning exchanges like this one, over the years. She is probably continuously surprised that I ever finished grade school, let alone graduate school. My mother was always long suffering, and I gave her reason for such suffering.

“It’s time to wake up!”

Sleeping and waking are something we are all familiar with. In fact “sleep” has become a popular topic for research. There are around 140 sleep clinics in our country. But the study of “sleep” isn’t new. Aristotle believed that those who have abnormally large heads are prone to being addicted to sleep. Frederick the Great, Goethe and Napoleon were famously frugal sleepers. Thomas Edison boasted that he slept only four hours a night – this not being too impressive since he took frequent naps during the day. Leonardo da Vinci experimented with sleeping 1.5 hours a day, but he stopped the experiment after five months when he began feeling tingly around the head and biting his tongue with alarming frequency. From antiquity, some have declared that:

Excessive sleep “dulls the spirit, fills the head full of gross humors, causeth distillations, rheums and great stores of excrement in the brain.”

And what to do for chronic Insomniacs? One classic remedy was to place horse leeches behind the ears before retiring. (I don’t know, but that seems like a sure fire way of keeping me awake!)

But when all is said and done, the majority opinion is that we the people of the 21st century in the United States are not getting enough sleep. One expert commented, “I can’t think of a single study that hasn’t found Americans getting less sleep than they ought to.”

We sleep 20-25% less than did those people of the 18th and 19th centuries. Studies have shown that the right amount of sleep will heighten productivity, creativity and focus. But no matter how long you sleep, you need to – Wake Up!

Alright, you’ve gotten your rest, you’ve slept – Now Wake Up! That’s Paul, giving the wake up call to the Christians in Rome around 50 C.E. Paul is using an easily identifiable image to make his point. Who hasn’t slept? Who hasn’t been awakened?

We may not be getting enough sleep today, but sooner or later there comes a time to Wake up! (Hopefully!) And Paul is yelling it out loud and clear. “This is no time to roll over and go back to sleep! This is not the time to cover your ears with your pillow!” Life is happening!

This is a great Advent text. It’s time to Wake Up for the arrival of the Christ child, the arrival of hope! For Paul this is a time of apocalyptic magnitude! From his viewpoint, we are living in times of crises.

Apocalyptic is always with us. From personal crisis, to societal crisis, to world crisis. Wake up! It’s time to live in hope!

One translation declares:

...it is time to wake up to reality...

Which reality? The “reality” that wrestles with the given of life, and fashions meaning and value. For Christians the reality that God is involved in creation; in your life!

- That even though the worst is thrown at you – this God of love and compassion is somehow present (within us and among us),
- That this Christ child – imposes the Divine into human life (that which is hopeful and inspiring in our existence).

Paul is talking to the Romans about the second appearing of the Christ. The Nativity is past, but there is expectation that God is going to once again do something new. From literal to metaphorical, the Great Creator is going to be creative again and again and again. God can’t help it; God is creative! (Perhaps it’s a character flaw. Would to God we were all so flawed) “So wake up and smell the coffee!” (That’s a Starbucks translation.)

You have slept enough. The time has come, the time is ripe, the time is full of possibilities!

“My God,” says Paul, “That time is at hand! It is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

Stop sleeping through life!

You better wake up to life!

- To where love eclipses hatred and mistrust!
- To where Compassion is the style!
- To where justice rolls down like a flowing stream!

Paul is a spiritual poet, and you know about Poets. They are crazy. They see things differently. Thank God for the poets!

I need a strong dose of poetry every once in a while to shake me from my strong rationalistic tendencies. My guess is most of us need to be shaken awake. We need to hear the poets cry, “It’s time to Wake Up! The time of

new opportunities is now! It's all so much closer than yesterday! Wake up! Advent is upon us! Don't sleep your life away! Engage!

It's time to Wake Up!

Amen.