

Learning to Stay Awake While the World is Ending

Advent 1 Year B

Mark 13:24-37

Pastor Troy

(Never mind the punctuation...I write to make it easier for me to read)

If Ole and I settle in for a relaxing evening and decide to wind down by watching something on Netflix....a movie, a documentary, maybe a made for tv sitcom of some kind....no matter how engaging or exciting or hilarious it may be....if we decide to turn off the lights for our viewing pleasure....if it is (let me be generous to myself...) after 8PM....sooner or later I will start to drift off to sleep. The same thing happens if I start reading after 8 or so....I've compared reading past 8 to my own personal melatonin...you know the feeling...your eyes get tired and just start to close for longer and longer periods of time....and you start to fade.... And then you are out! Or at least that is my experience..

It is hard for me to keep awake, stay awake, or most certainly stay alert....after a certain time....

it is just not the way I'm wired.... It's just not natural for me...to do that....

keep awake, stay awake, stay alert Jesus says...easier said than done....at least for me...

“See these massive and magnificent buildings” the disciples exclaim as they point to the temple....and Jesus replies”Do you see all these great building....not one stone will be left on another....” In other words....the world as you know it is coming to an end....The temple, which represented not only the center of religious life but political and economic life too....was going to be destroyed..come tumbling down....stone by stone....and it was in 70 AD by the Roman Empire.....It would have been difficult for the disciples to imagine life without the temple as the center of everything.....It felt like their world was ending....

This is how the chapter we find ourselves in this morning begins..... And, soon after there are warnings and mentions of the end....and we are told to be “on guard”24 short verses later.... Jesus says, *in those days*....following *that distress*.... The sun will be darkened, the moon will stop giving light, stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be *shaken*....and the Son of Man will return with great power and glory....

And...the disciples are told that no one knows....when this will happen...It would be like the world was ending...

So... keep awake, stay awake, stay alert Jesus says.....because the world is ending and he is coming again....

I felt like my world was ending....whether it was a diagnosis or a discovery... your life felt like it was shaken...what was stable was now unstable....or your job, or your family, or something you kept safe inside that finally came out into the open and threw you or others off balance, or maybe you came face to face with something that caused you to scrutinize your faith to its core.....your worldview was seriously called into question....because of something you learned/experienced/or someone you met...and it felt like the world you had made your home in was tumbling down.....and there was no going back.....it could not be rebuilt....

when I was 6 years old my parents got divorced..and I still am shaped by that moment when a world I had known was ending...and other times throughout my life/particularly in college....I felt like the house of cards I had built my faith on had fallen over..stone by stone...

I'm sure if we started inviting people to share about when it felt like their world was ending....we would find ourselves occupied for quite some time.....we are not alone in this....all of us have felt like this in some way.....just in 2020 even..some more than others...

It felt like the world was ending...

These endings, like deaths that we experience throughout our lives, losses that accumulate....doors that close...they sometimes feel like the center of our lives have crumbled..stone by stone... Maybe you are experiencing it right now...
..These lead us to loudly lament like Isaiah in our first reading, "O God, tear open the heavens and come down".....

It is in the midst of these endings/deaths/losses we are told to keep awake, stay awake, stay alert.....And not be found asleep...easier said than done...Sometimes the last thing we want...to do is stay awake when the sun is darkened in our lives....and who could blame us...How do we learn to stay awake when the world is ending around us.....

These words/admonitions from Jesus...are not to scold us, they are not a nudge to sweep suffering under a rug and pretend like everything is just fine.....to move on quickly from discomfort/deny our loss and grief...but an invitation to go deeper...to acknowledge them....to face them....to tell the truth about them...to sit in our pain and sorrow/endings and look at our grief...to name it..... To look death in the eye...

We are invited to go all the way to the bottom...where the cards have fallen and the rubble is...to face our endings...all the way through our deaths large and small....awake and alert to our real emotions and honest lives, to our worlds end...because there in the deep darkness when our days lack light and night settles in and not even the moon is giving off a flicker.... we find that our brother and Savior is right beside us whose name is Jesus....We find that he comes again....right there....right then....he promises it.....

It's just not the way I'm wired...not the way most of us are wired...it's not natural....

to respond to Jesus' invitation to keep awake, stay awake and alert....the world tells us we cannot face *those* things.... We cannot be honest about our deaths/loss/grief/endings...we cannot handle telling the truth about the pain and suffering of life....so we either deny it, repress it, or explain it away/or weave it into something else....and lull ourselves into a slumber...afraid of what will happen if we are awake on the other side...

Everything Happens for a Reason and other lies I've loved...Is a book written by Katie Bowler...a professor at Duke who had studied the prosperity gospel whose creed is health = Blessings from God...sickness/failure= God's disapproval..then she was diagnosed with cancer....

The prospect of her own mortality....her book description goes on.... *forces Kate to realize that she has been tacitly subscribing to the prosperity gospel, living with the conviction that she can control the shape of her life with "a surge of determination."* Even as this type of Christianity celebrates the American can-do spirit, it implies that if you "can't do" and succumb to illness or misfortune, you are a failure¹and how often do we consciously or subconsciously confess our faith in that creed as well....The opposite of that way of thinking is what we might call...."the theology of the cross..." which Luther in his heidelberg disputation describes as "calling a thing what it is"².....no closing our eyes...or falling asleep...

In baptism...clothed with Christ and filled with the Spirit, given the gift of faith..we are free to do exactly that... and that is what it means for us...to stay awake while the world is ending... because there....standing on the other side, wherever that it... we see the object of our faith...the one who has gone the whole way with us....into everything/all it means to be human...all the way to the outer edges *with* us....through the loss/grief/despair/to the world's end/our worlds end....embracing it all....

¹ *Everything Happens for a Reason and other Lies I've Loved*, Kate Bowler
<https://www.amazon.com/Everything-Happens-Reason-Other-Loved/dp/0399592067> | quotes from her author page here: <https://katebowler.com/books/everything-happens-for-a-reason/>

² Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation Theses 21

And....standing there... Jesus...the one who dies an outcast and alone....taking upon himself all our sin and despair...on the cross.... With all the despised and suffering ones....he then rises again....but still bearing his wounds....and he finds us....searches us out....walks toward us and makes his home here...beside us....holding us in his arms....he makes his Advent/arrival/entrance in this world....down here...down below....with you and me....

And...then....awake and alert with eyes wide open.... We see him.....
With the eyes of faith....we are free to trust in his death and resurrection....his future for us which includes our wounds just as it includes his....that doesn't escape death but goes through it towards something new.....and we help one another see it....even when we can't ourselves/staying awake while others can't..... through the new community he creates/the church/his body/you!...

we testify to our ends/grief/loss/death....bearing witness to our full lives...to another....and in that space....we see Jesus.....and *together* we live into the new future that the spirit is creating....

Together....with Jesus, the Spirit's power, and our lives we live with courage and freedom....

Then you will find in those unexpected places/unexpected ways....that he has come again and again..and still does today....as he promised in his word...that will never pass away.....

So....like me...it might be natural for us to fall asleep easily...at the start of a netflix show, or a good book...if it's late enough.... Or be lulled asleep by the noise of the world and of our lives...some of it we would rather not hear....but if we can learn to listen to it..to go there, welcome it...to stay awake and alert while the world is ending... we might stumble into God's new future....And find Jesus has come again....