

“Sleeping and Waking”

(Matthew 24.36-44)

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Introduction

Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, Anthony de Mello told this delightful story...

‘A man knocks on his son’s door in the morning. “Jaime, wake up!”

Jaime answers from the other side of the door, “I don’t want to get up, Papa.”

So the father calls again, “Get up, you have to go to school.”

“But Papa I don’t want to go to school.”

“Why not?” asks the father entering the room.

“Three reasons,” says Jaime. “First of all, because it’s so boring; second because the kids tease me; and third because I hate school.”

Quietly the father walks to his son’s bedside. “Son, I am going to give you three reasons why you must go to school. ... Firstly, because it is your duty; second, because you are 45 years old... and third, because you are the headmaster.”

It’s a cute story, but de Mello’s conclusion is challenging. *“Wake up, wake up! You’ve grown up. You’re too big to be asleep. Wake up! Stop playing with your toys. Life awaits you.”*

The Texts

Today could well be called *‘Wake Up Sunday’* – *waking-up* is the central theme of both the Gospel and the Second Reading (Romans 13.9-14)

Listen to the key words, the urgent words from today’s Gospel... *Stay awake... be ready... be alert... be vigilant!* Why? Because God’s coming is unexpected... Jesus says, *‘You’ve got no idea when the great moment of salvation is coming. Even I don’t know when!’*

Paul is on the same message... *“You know what time it is... now is the moment for you to wake up from sleep. Salvation is near... the night is far gone, the day is near.”* (NRSV) Or in the Eugene Peterson translation... *“The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up*

and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on his salvation work...” Don’t miss it!

The metaphor being presented is crystal clear – God calls us to wake up... to leave our sleep state and engage in alert, attentive awake-ness. It’s simple enough and quite evocative... but what does it mean to be *asleep*... and what would it be like to be truly *awake*?

Being Asleep

Here’s Anthony de Mello again...

Most people, even though they don’t know it, are asleep. “They’re born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence. Most people never get to see that all is well because they are asleep. They are having a nightmare.”

Both Jesus and Paul are saying something similar – that people are so consumed with ‘business as usual’ they never wake up to what’s really happening.

In the Gospel, Jesus says we’re like the story of Noah... people going about their daily lives completely oblivious to the flood that’s coming. Paul is even more explicit.

“...make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God.”

And then he goes on to describe what we spend our days on, as a waste of time!

“We can’t afford to waste a minute... we mustn’t squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight.”

I’d hate to hear what he’d say about the lifestyles of 21st century Australians like us!

Being asleep is living an unconscious life... an unreflective life... It’s just going along with the crowd, doing whatever the culture dictates... *‘Well, everyone else lives this way... thinks this way... so of course I do too.’*

Jesus and Paul say that the trouble with the unconscious life is, that you end-up missing out. The moment of God's liberation comes in your life and you're oblivious to it... you never even see it!

And De Mello says the sleep actually becomes a nightmare. It's what the scriptural texts are saying when they use the metaphors of *darkness* and *night*. Our unconsciousness becomes a nightmare existence... We're pushed and pulled by a culture that is anything *but* wise and life-giving. We're tossed around at the mercy of the unconscious drivers from our wounded past. We're asleep... unconscious... stuck in the nightmare of never-ending night.

Being Awake

What would it look like then, if we were to wake up?

Waking up would be to live a conscious life... to leave the dream world and enter the real world... to leave the illusion and engage instead with true reality. Waking up would mean being present to life as it really is, not that madness that screams from our televisions and computers, not that madness of our inner voices constantly replaying narratives from our past.

It means to wake up to the truth. But what is reality? Whose version are we talking about? As Pilate says to Christ Jesus at the trial, *'What is truth? Is your reality the same as mine?'* How do you and I find our way through so many contesting and conflicting voices and opinions?

The scriptural metaphor operates very simply in its guidance... We look for the *light*! We'll know the moment when it comes, because it will be filled with light, not the shadows of darkness. It's a simple discernment we can apply to any experience – is this light-filled or is it shrouded in darkness?

Paul takes this further...

"Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!"

“Dress yourselves in Christ”... put on the clothes of Christ’s reality. Another similar metaphor he uses is *‘Have the same mind as Christ’* (Philippians 2.5)... in other words, see life according to Christ’s vision... see reality as Christ saw it. For that radically different vision of Christ – that all life is *gift and blessing* – is true reality.

Conclusion

It’s *Wake Up Sunday!* Leave the nightmare of unconscious sleep and step into the light of day. Be alert and attentive... watch for what God is doing, for the moments when the Spirit knocks on your door with the gift of true life. Don’t be so distracted, so consumed with activity and noise, that you miss it.

“Get out of bed and get dressed! Don’t loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!”