

When I was serving as a vicar in Texas, my supervising pastor had sleep apnea. Sleep apnea is when your body does not let you get good sleep at night so you are tired all day long. He told me that at the beginning of his ministry he was a mission pastor in Texas and had to drive many miles between 4 or 5 mission congregations that he was overseeing. And he said that he developed a lot of strategies to stay awake while he was driving. He would have a bag of corn nuts and he would eat one nut at a time and for some reason helped him Stay Awake. Today Jesus tells us to Stay Awake spiritually until he returns. **Stay Awake! 1. Because you do not know when Jesus will return. 2. Because Jesus has given you a job to do.**

Many have tried to predict the calendar date of Jesus’ return. Many have said, “I predict that Jesus will return on January 1st, in the year 2000.” It baffles me that any Christian would try to predict the date of Jesus’ return because Jesus could not say it any more clearly. Verse 32: **“But about that day or hour no one knows.”** Verse 33: **“You do not know when that time will come.”** Verse 35: **“You do not know when the owner of the house will come back.”** No Christian knows and no Christian is supposed to know the calendar date of Christ’s return.

You see Christ’s return is like a surprise inspection at your work. The point of a surprise inspection is that it could happen at any time, so you should be ready all the time. Jesus tells a little parable and in the parable the Lord of the house puts a doorkeeper in front of his house and in verse 34 **“tells him to keep watch” (Mark 13:34)**. The Lord of the house expects this doorkeeper to stay awake all night. He expects him to pull an all-nighter: **“Tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping” (Mark 13:34-35)**. The Lord wants this doorkeeper to stay awake all night. And the Jesus wants us to stay awake spiritually until he returns.

How could we fall asleep spiritually? Well, if you are completely asleep spiritually that means you are an unbeliever. And we are not unbelievers. We trust in Jesus as our Savior and so we are spiritually awake. But sometimes also we believers can become spiritually sleepy. And Jesus here encourages us to be more alert.

Jesus wants us to be alert in at least three ways. Jesus wants us to be alert by paying close attention to his word when it is explained in church and in Bible class.

Jesus wants us to be alert by fighting against sin. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says, **“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of Lord will come like a thief in the night. ... So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2; 6-7)**. Jesus wants us to be alert by fighting against sins, and the example he gives here is the sin of drunkenness.

Jesus wants us to be alert by taking temptation seriously. In the next chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Mark shows how even Peter at times did not take temptation seriously. Jesus warned him at the Last Supper. “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter thought, “I would never disown Jesus.” He didn’t take temptations seriously enough. And then in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to Peter “Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation.” But what did Peter do instead? He fell asleep. Normally physically falling asleep isn’t a bad thing but you get the impression that Peter did not take seriously enough the temptation that was about to come his way. And just a few hours later the rooster crowed and Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus (Mark 14:66-72).

Jesus wants us to be alert by paying close attention to his word, by staying away from sin and by taking temptation seriously. But we all have to admit that there have been times where we have not been very spiritually alert. So what do we do about it? Well, we can’t ourselves do anything about it. We look at what our

Savior has done. You see the real key to staying awake until Jesus returns is believing the gospel. We stay awake until Jesus returns by trusting in Jesus as our Savior from sin. This is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a Latin word that means *coming*. In Advent we talk about the three times when Jesus comes. In Advent we think about how Jesus will come on the last day. But in Advent we also think about how Jesus came the first time to be our Savior. Peter fell asleep that night but Jesus stayed awake. Jesus stayed awake all night. While the rooster was crowing in the early morning hours Jesus was on trial before the Jewish leaders and at dawn he was taken to Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death. And at nine in the morning after no sleep he was nailed to the cross. I want you to know that Jesus did that because he loves you and because he wanted to wipe every single last one of your sins and mine.

So in Advent we talk about three *comings* of Jesus. He will come on the last day. He did come to be our Savior. And we also think about how Jesus comes to us right now in the Word and in the sacraments to assure us that he has forgiven us. When you read the Bible in church and in Bible class and in your homes, Jesus actually comes right to you and says, "I have forgiven you." And in the Lord's Supper, Jesus actually comes to us and says, "This is my body. I gave it for you, for the forgiveness of sins." "This is my blood. I shed it on the cross for you, for the forgiveness of your sins." Those gospel promises will keep you awake until Jesus comes back.

So we've said that we should stay awake spiritually because we do not know when Jesus will return. Another reason we should stay awake spiritually is because Jesus had given to each of us a job to do. In verse 34, Jesus says, **"It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task." (Mark 13:34).** Jesus has given each one of you a task. My task is that I am a pastor. My task is to visit shut-ins and reach out to non-Christians and pray for my members. If you are a member of the church council you have your task on church council. But even besides our specific tasks at church. Jesus has given to all of us other tasks. You see Lutherans are unique in that Lutherans recognize in Scripture something called the doctrine of vocation. The doctrine of vocation is that if you are an auto mechanic, you serve God by being an auto mechanic. That is the task Jesus has given you: to be the best auto mechanic you can possibly be. To most of us he has given more than one task. For me I'm a husband and a father and a pastor. Now Jesus does not say that I have to be the best at any of those things, but he does want me to be busily and energetically engaged in those tasks when he returns.

The Christian life is never boring. The Christian life is incredibly exciting because this is the task Jesus has given me to do. You know a lot of groups who have predicted the date of the end of the world have completely stopped all activity on the days leading up to that date. But we shouldn't abandon our everyday tasks in the days leading up to Jesus' return. We should do our tasks harder and faster and better. Think of Jesus' parable. If the servants heard that the master was about to return do you think they would stop all of their household chores? No it would be the opposite. There would be a flurry of activity. You don't know when Jesus will return, but always be actively and busily engaged in the tasks that Jesus has given you. Here at church, at your jobs and in your homes. We wait for Jesus to come back not by doing nothing, but by doing the tasks that he has given us to do.

So how do we stay awake as we wait for Jesus to return? We stay awake by hearing and believing his word of forgiveness and receiving with believing hearts his sacraments of forgiveness. And we stay awake, by busily doing the tasks that he has given us to do. Amen.