

## **1 Advent Year A 2019 - 12-01-2019**

The world is noisy, busy, confused and chaotic. Let us come aside to a place of quiet and peace in which to prepare for the arrival of the Christ child. Amen

I fully realize that this would never happen here at Christ Episcopal Church but when I was younger and attending the Catholic Church, it was not uncommon to see someone nodding off during the sermon. Yes, shocking though it may be, folks sometimes fall asleep. Someone came up with very helpful tips for those who can't stay awake.

ONE: Never fall asleep flat on the pew. To keep this from happening, it's actually better to sit in a crowded pew, shoulder to shoulder with people on your left and right. Otherwise, if you fall asleep, you might lean right over on the pew and that's not good.

TWO: When you sleep, don't fall completely asleep, but just power nap instead. If you fall completely asleep, your sleep apnea might kick in and that's embarrassing. Better to just go half-asleep, so that you're vaguely aware of your surroundings. It helps to use a bible to prop your chin up, or lean against your head. You can close your eyes, as long as the Bible is in view because the preacher will think you're praying.

THREE: Sit with someone who's sympathetic to your plight. Your spouse may not be the right person. You need a friend who will nudge you if the preacher seems to be looking in your direction a lot. Make sure a Prayer Book is open on your lap, or is prominently in view. Your friend can rouse you so that you can say "Amen" and get back to your nap.

FOUR: Don't sit in the back pew. Believe it or not, this is the first place preachers look for sermon slackers. If you sit in the first or second pew, you can actually get more sleep in because the priest will just look right past you.

Finally: Don't sleep through the entire sermon. After all, the preacher has something from the Lord you probably need to hear. But when you've heard it, you have no further obligation to stay awake. Still, if you can be awake for some of the sermon, you can then refer to it when you're leaving the church and shaking the pastor's hand. "Wonderful sermon, Reverend! I especially enjoyed the part where ...."

I will provide copies of these tips for those who would like to study them further.

Sleep has become a big issue in this country.

Imagine this -- It's been a long, exhausting day filled with work, obligations, meetings, errands and responsibilities. You were up early and plowed through your "to do" list at work. Eventually, you make it home only to find more chores to do. Finally, the day comes to an end, and what do you want to do? Fall into bed, relax as your eyes get heavy, and gently slip into a deep, refreshing sleep. And then you repeat it all the next day.

However, we often do not get the refreshing sleep we so desperately need.

We know that if we sleep well, we feel more alert, more energetic, happier, and better able to function.

Scientific research is revealing, for example, how sleep loss and even poor-quality sleep, can lead to an increase in errors at the workplace, decreased productivity, and accidents that cost both lives and resources. Employers in the United States complain about workers

who doze off in front of their computers or who even fall asleep while operating machinery, which endangers them and everyone around them. Job performance is suffering because workers show up overtired.

Sleep deprivation negatively impacts our mood, our ability to focus, and our ability to access higher-level cognitive functions, such as processing and remembering things.

I vividly remember pulling “all-nighters” in Physician Assistant School. I averaged 2 hours of sleep over several months. There were days that we would have 4 exams and would stay up all night studying. Rather than doing better on the exams, by the afternoons, I simply couldn’t think. I could barely stay awake. Coffee could only do so much. Sleep deprivation is also linked to obesity, chronic fatigue, depression, Type 2 Diabetes, chronic pain and motor vehicle accidents.

So, when we look at our readings this morning, there seems to be a contradiction between a healthy need of sleep and staying awake. It reminds me of the story about Rip Van Winkle? Washington Irving told it, a long time ago. A certain Dutch gentleman by the name of Rip Van Winkle, who lives in New York’s Hudson Valley, obtains a batch of strange moonshine from some mysterious little men. He drinks the brew, then falls asleep for twenty years. When he awakens, his family and friends have all either aged significantly or died.

He thought he was getting the best of those magical little men, driving a hard bargain for their hooch. He thought he was living life on his own terms -- when, in fact, he missed life in all its fullness.

Not only does he miss out on family life, Rip sleeps right through the most fascinating events of his day, or even his century. When Rip goes to sleep, his favorite tavern has a sign

out front honoring King George III. When he wakes up, there's a new sign, honoring another George, by the name of Washington. While this foolish man snores away, oblivious to his surroundings, great -- and even earth-shaking events -- are taking place. He misses them all!

We hear this morning from Jesus and Paul about staying awake to what is going on all around us. Paul says; "you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep". Jesus tells us; "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour".

Neither of them is saying that we do not need sleep. They are talking about sleeping through life, sleeping through the truth of what is coming, sleeping and not preparing for the return of Jesus. I am not telling you anything that you haven't heard a thousand times before. Jesus isn't saying that eating, drinking, and getting married was bad in Noah's time or ours. He is describing everyday life. Noah listened to God and was preparing for what was to come; everyone else was going on with the business of life; totally oblivious to the signs around them. Paul was a little more direct as he usually is. "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; 13let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires". In other words, wake up and be ready.

Jesus is telling us not to go through life like a sleepwalker, without seeing or noticing what's going on all around us. It's time for us to open not only our eyes, but also our spirits, so that we can be aware of how God is moving and guiding us through our lives. He is telling us to "Stay awake!" so that we will be ready to respond to the needs around us. We need to stay alert (3) so that we can notice God at work in our midst. Advent is a time (4) to wake up our spirits so that we can be aware of God's presence in our lives. Jesus talks about a God who will surprise us by coming when we're not looking or arriving in a way that we do not expect. This powerful Advent passage reminds us to be aware that the God who came into the world as a baby so many years ago still wishes to enter our lives today. Too often we find ourselves with the innkeepers who turn away Mary and Joseph with the words, "we have no room." Our minds are full, our calendars are packed, our expectations are low, so we're not actively looking and seeking for the living Christ in our midst. Jesus cries, "Wake up!" What miracles are we missing simply because we are too distracted to notice? What blessings are we passing by because our minds are consumed with endless details? Are we blindly stumbling through our lives unaware of God's presence all around us? It is really not just about the Christmas season. It is about missing the blessings of God's presence with us every day. When talking about Advent, The Very Rev. Ian Markham says: "Life is precious and short. Are we using the gift of time well? We should treat every second as an opportunity to grow, to forgive, to support someone in need, and to love".

Jesus is nudging our souls awake and asking us to open our eyes to what is true – that God is breaking into the world. Advent reminds us of the Emmanuel, the Good News that God is with us. It can be a time of increased awareness. The world needs this. Be ready, be awake and look for the God who promises to come to us. Amen!

