



“EVEN SO, WE WAKE UP”
SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 5: 1-11
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, November 19, 2023
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God.

Wake, watch, wait, woke
Don't sleep on a world
That lulls us into stupors
That tells us stories, boring
Into our psyches the falsity
Of purpose, the charade of brokenness.

We are taught to other, we

Are taught to smother our shared humanity
We give away our sanity for waking and sleeping
For glaring light in smooth dark that births us
And for cloaks and shadows in warm daylight truth
We are made for both dark and light, sleep and awake

No sleep is a form of torture
Insomnia a smoldering, pricking
Harsh night time trip through
Worst case scenarios and stark reality
Sleep a physical necessity
The only way for muscles to repair
For the unconscious to air her wisdom
In the dancing dreams of strange truth

We need awake and asleep
To be human, to be fully alive
The foremothers stayed awake
Suckling the children of calamity
Our forefathers slept before
Conquest, before they left home in the
Name of divine right, in the name of
That gasoline of spite, at the crack
Of first light

Nowadays you can't stay woke
Without being the stoke in the
Fire of political heads talking
Squawking about all the things
The liberals and conservatives do
And don't ever just sit in
The values askew in an economy
That has a price on all our heads
As soon as we are born
Our worth tangled in scorn, in
The forlorn thud of the capitalist
Moniker—you are what you produce
Seduced as we all are that our
Consumption is our most basic function

We spend and cost ourselves everything
No matter if we sleep or if we lie awake
At night terrified that first light will come
Too soon or that we will miss it,
That life is over
Over and over and over
We turn it around in our minds
Blood boiling, skin recoiling at the
Thoughts racing, spacing us apart
From each other, from God,
From the sweet child within us
Who just wanted love, who delighted
In the simplest of things
Who remembers the first stings
Of realizing the cruelty of a world
Pitted against its own best possibilities.

We wake up every day to a beautiful and languishing
World. Children are dying, crying, shaking, quaking
As their world crumbles, as any theater of war
Morphs into no holds barred in the name of protection.

When we sleep we are vulnerable. Bodies
Limp with a relaxation we sometimes can't
Choose to trust or resist. The body will sleep
At some point—involuntarily it will slump, it will
Let go, it will fall into a place far from here
Unaware, unattached, unburdened and yet
So heavy with the exhaustion of
Hypervigilance.

Staying awake is the language of trauma
Of not trusting our surroundings.
Of needing lights on at all times
Because the dark is when the monsters come
When the locks on windows and doors
Can't be trusted
When thieves come and worlds
End in the blink of an eye, in the tired lid
Heavy that finally cannot but sleep

Staying asleep is a sickness
A comatose loss of consciousness
An induction of brains off line
So the body can recover
Or even quietly let go of life
Sleep can mean death
The breath in one moment ceased
Released to some mystery of timing
And seasons.
We know not when it comes—the endings
And the beginnings.
We live in that uncertainty—the thieves
In the night, the untimely deaths, the
Strange twist, the surprising turns
We are caught up in the always and never
The delusions of we will secure our future
By what we earn, by the delusion of merit,
Of hard work and striving
We tell ourselves we can insure our own
Thriving, that we are free agents,
Rugged individuals, virtuous souls.
That we can have the corner on the market
When it comes to propriety, to roles,
To the right ways, to the best possible
Plays on words and lives
Our words actually do play with people's lives

We think we can talk our way into virtue
When talk is cheap, until it seeps deep
Into our habits of minds, our susceptibilities to
Ways of being, ways of seeing
The world we call ours

Does God call us to own this world?
Or to tend it? Are we spending instead
Of tending? Are we sleeping when we need to be awake?
Are we fighting sleep when we need restoration, and repair?

It's whiteness that made woke an epithet

Because that's what inferiority complexes do
They steal the words, the rallying cries of
The ones they've tried to project their sense of
Inferiority onto. The projections are fast and furious,
The origins of such self-destructive resistance to
Full humanity are chillingly curious
Why has the stark awake glaring whiteness
Needed to squeeze the life out of us
So hard, so harsh, so unrelentingly awash
With bad blood, spilled, spoiled, boiled
To a curdling, sappy stuck in the unhappy
Place of seeing the well-being of some
As necessitating the destruction of many

Why do we tolerate this untenable,
Unsustainable existence with such persistence
We, the people who cooperate, who collaborate,
Who collude with the keeping things the way
They are. With protecting our death dealing
Fears from being faced, with letting the cost of living
Be far outpaced by our tolerance for
The languishing of most

We made our beds with the enemy
A frenemy, a part of our own family
We fell asleep to the sound of friendly fire
We dropped off to sleep when things are most dire
We forgot to work together so we can spell
Each other in the effort-to stay awake and to rest
So that we can find our way to the better, to the best
Ways of sharing a world
That has never been ours
The world is so much bigger than its human
Passengers. So full of cellular and magnificent messengers
That teach us to look and to listen, to learn and to grow.

Woke is not an epithet, it's a community's wisdom
That the future of our human family
Means the end of the system
That is rooted in white violence and greed

That infects us unchecked

The song of Black liberation, the call
For people to wake up and see
The ways Black Lives Matter
That's not a bunch of liberal chatter
Or progressive political banter
That's the voice of our siblings who
Are carrying the weight of the harm
That need white people to join in sounding the alarm
Things are not ok as they are.
That the land of the free and the home of the brave
Is far from who we aspire to be

Our faith requires the courage to claim
Just how awake God needs us to be
This kind of woke is wise to the trauma
That makes sleep a frightening prospect
That tells us the stupor of whiteness is suspect
It's not a catch phrase,
It's an anthem of promise and pain
It's the truth of a people who long to be free
Who are seasoned enough to know
That means all of us—all the you's and all the me's
We cannot sleep, siblings in Christ,
On God's call for us to care for each other
As we traverse this long road to liberation,
This journey to a land promised
By the visions God births in our
Dreaming and in our sober acknowledgement
A world that longs for a peace and tranquility
That is not the eerie aftermath of conquest,
But the joyful unfolding of repair that is true
The harmony of human being in tune
With our shared future, with our deep
Need for each other to truly thrive

We wake up, dear family, when we
Stop fighting the false sleep of denial
Stop settling for life just being survival

Waking up is our birthright and our promised land
When we get there our rest will be glorious
Victorious not from the spoils of war
But from the belovedness we share at our very core.