

Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church
Cincinnati, Ohio
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prepared by: Dr. K Nicholas Yoda

Sermon: Open Your Eyes...

Scripture References: 1 Samuel 3:1-10
Matthew 26:40-46
Acts 20:9
Romans 13:11

WARNING: I like very bizarre movies...

It was a strange piece of cinema at best but in the opening sequence of the 2001 film *Vanilla Sky* (directed by Cameron Crowe...a remake of the 1997 Spanish hit *Abre los Ojos* directed by Alejandro Amenabar), character David Aames (played by Tom Cruise) is fast asleep when his alarm clock goes off in a most unusual manner. Instead of an annoying beeping sound or even the blaring music of a radio, it is instead the whisper of a woman repeating over and over again...open your eyes...open your eyes...open your eyes...

Open your eyes. This is something that will become a mantra to Christa and me in the next few weeks as sleep deprivation will once again abruptly enter our world with the expansion of our family with our little girl Rylee Nicole Yoda. Instead of the whisper of a woman though calling us to an awakened state of being, it will be the cry of a newborn that can only be described as the noise that I would assume a pterodactyl to make as it swoops to overtake its prey (not that I am a paleontologist but I did see *Jurassic Park*). And at four AM as we are in the midst of feedings, diapers, singing soothing songs, and rocking back and forth begging this little one to fall back into neverland for a few more hours, my personal mantra will kick in...open your eyes...open your eyes...open your eyes...

I shall not forget the time that I asked a friend of mine what prepared him the most be able to complete the Navy SEAL Training leading to him serving on SEAL Team #4. His reply was the last answer I thought I would ever hear. Al told me that being a new father was the best

preparation. He went on to say that sleep deprivation is one of the main ways that SEAL training instructors will use to break down the physical and mental state of a person in training. Al said that with a colicky baby at home, this was nothing new. In fact Al states that he got more sleep at SEAL training than he did with a newborn. Open your eyes...

Being a new father. I remember distinctly the first few nights after bringing Aidan home from the hospital, we set up a schedule for someone to be awake and present in the nursery. I remember pulling one of the late night/early morning shifts (the shift where you would swear that time has stood still because the minutes have literally turned into hours...) and I started to think about many things. The first thing that ran through my mind was the words of a Harry Chapin song that means much to one near and dear to me as it was almost an autobiography of sorts.

My child arrived just the other day
 He came to the world in the usual way
 But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
 He learned to walk while I was away
 And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
 He'd say "I'm gonna be like you dad
 You know I'm gonna be like you"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
 Little boy blue and the man on the moon
 When you comin' home dad?
 I don't know when, but we'll get together then son
 You know we'll have a good time then

I prayed that this was never my story. I also parsed the experience of the disciples' struggle at Gethsemane. The spirit is willing but the flesh is so weak...

There they were, Peter James and John, left to wait as Jesus prayed in the garden. As Jesus returned to them, being deeply grieved even to death, and praying for his very life-for the cup to possibly pass over him, he came (as it says in Matthew 26:40-46)...

40...to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43 Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are

you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

The spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak. What I realized in meditating on this scripture in the wee hours of the morn sitting in a glider rocking chair fighting to keep my eyes open was that this sleep versus awake struggle is not something that only applies to our physical being; it applies even more deeply to that of spiritual being. I am convinced that as Christ approached and saw the sleeping disciples, he knew that their struggle to stay awake was more than just a physical reality. The disciples were in a state of wrestling with being spiritually asleep versus spiritually awake. It is not a mistake that Christ tells them to stay awake and pray. Open your eyes and pray. Open your eyes so that you are more than just physically awake. Open your eyes and stare through the window in the sky and converse with Yahweh so that the time of trial would not come to you. The end result though is their decision to remain followers of the Christ, yet in his greatest hour of need, to sleep both physically and spiritually right through it.

The more that I meditate on this piece of scripture, the more I am inclined to agree with spiritual writer Brennan Manning. According to Brennan, there are two types of Christians-those that are asleep and those that are awake. Those that will stay awake with Christ and pray and those that will constantly fall asleep and ignore what the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Romans (Romans 13:11) when he states, "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." There are those that will take seriously the commandments of the Christ (Luke 12:35-36) when he says, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their masters to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks." And then there are those who will take the path of Eutychus in the 20th chapter of the book of Acts versus 9. "A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead." Please note that this is not a

warning to avoid falling asleep during this sermon...aside from the fact that we have no three story windows. The good thing for Eutychus is that the Scriptures say that Paul immediately went to check on him and found life. Maybe this is what inspired Paul a few days later to state in his message to the Ephesian elders, "Therefore be alert..."

There is somewhat of a "catch 22" of this reality that I have chosen to bring into the light this day. This message could easily be construed as a chance for us to make some attempt to separate the sheep from the goats...to purge the church roles and decide who is truly committed to the cause...to find out who is with and who is against us. Let me state very clearly that if you have interpreted this communication that I share with you as a chance to look upon your fellow brother and sister in Christ in judgment of their spiritual being and personal relationship with the Jesus, then you have gravely misinterpreted my point. No one is in a position to do that aside from the Messiah himself.

My personal feeling is if we choose to judge anyone's spirituality, we should look in the mirror and stick with the person that we see there. If the image of your mirror looks vaguely like the one that I find in mine, you might find a person who lives on both sides of this reality in any given moment. Sometimes I am the one to open my eyes and stay alert as I pray that the time of trial will not come my way. And then there are the times that I am Eutychus falling out the window because I have spiritually fallen asleep. Though I personally dwell in a battle of sorts between these two realities, I do find great hope-not in myself and my own abilities to conquer what I will call spiritual sleep depravation- but in God's agape' ability to not give up on me and constantly make attempts to wake me up in those times that I am asleep. Open you eyes...open your eyes...open your eyes...

It is much like the reality of Samuel that we find in 1 Samuel 3:1-10:

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I

am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Four times we find Samuel lying in the temple with God calling to him. Three times he goes to Eli whose reply is simply, "I did not call you." The fourth time that God calls Samuel, "Samuel, Samuel, open your eyes...", Samuel is awake both physically and spiritually for his reply is, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

The beauty that I find in this scripture is the simple fact that God did not give up on Samuel and His attempts to awaken him from his lying in the temple. Even though Samuel does not recognize the calling of Yahweh, even though Samuel has to go by Eli's advice that it might be God calling, even though Samuel does not get it right the first time, God does not give up in Samuel. Though God only called him four times, I am convinced God would have called him four hundred times, four thousand times, four million times in the same fashion. "Samuel, Samuel, open your eyes...open your eyes...open your eyes..."

In the same manner...God does not give up on us so easily. In the times that we are spiritually asleep there is a constant voice...a constant presence...a constant invitation. "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? The hour is at hand...open your eyes." What we are left with is a simple decision. How do we reply? How do we respond? Do we continue to return to our state of spiritual sleep like Peter, James and John did that lonely night in Gethsemane or do we reply as Samuel did saying, "Speak, for your servant is listening."? Do we follow in the footsteps of Eutychus where sleep leads to a very hard landing or do we take the words of Paul to heart: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers."?

And the whisper of God continues repeating over and over...open your eyes...open your eyes...open your eyes...

And to Rylee...L'Incontro...The Meeting by Andrea Bocelli...

While like a giant, proud and happy,
I take my baby in my arms, fragile, innocent, and alive
And like a little bird she's pushing against my chest
Abandoned, quiet and safe, for an instant, almost sweetly
My destiny appears to me like a dream

And I see myself, old and surrendered,
Seated there near the coalfire,
Waiting for the evening with the anxiety of a child,
Just to see her coming back home
With the gift of her smile, of her words and kindness
It's like a promise that can solve the enormous joy
Of one of her caresses

Then I wake up and I have already forgotten
But inside of me the kid's trapped soul advises me
That his new born child is already more important to me
than that of my own life....