

The Rev. Billy Cervený 8am:

I was talking to a college buddy of mine the other day, and we were remembering a professor that we had in school. And, I can tell this story because my professor had a good sense of humor about it, and he used to joke about it himself.

But he was this, this professor who's really dynamic. He had this great personality. People love to take his class. He would stand up and he had these great stories, and he was so engaging, which can otherwise, you know, how that can be sometimes. And he had this incredible gift for, for roping people in all when he was on his feet.

But the problem is this guy had severe narcolepsy. Now the this is if you don't know what that is, it's a neurologic. It's a sleep disorder. And it's narcolepsy means that if you're going and sometimes if you have a really bad, you're in the middle of a conversation and you can it can be dangerous. You fall asleep in the middle of a conversation or something you're doing during the course of the day.

His narcolepsy, he was fine as long as he was walking, but when he sat down and he got comfortable, he would be out, his head would fall back, and he would be sawing logs within a couple of minutes. And every this was fine. Like I said, normal during the normal course of our class. And the only until he sat down in the times when he would usually sit down was during exams.

So he'd sit down and everybody would be with our pen and paper and everybody would be looking up, waiting for it to happen. And you'd see him fighting it at first and he's like, you know, leaning, repositioning, trying to get uncomfortable. But eventually he was just you heard he was out cold leaning back in his chair. And you learn a lot about the integrity of some people.

When you're professor falls asleep in the middle of the exam, who cheats and who doesn't and whatnot. Anyway, but one day I think this had happened a number of times was during the final weeks of our school, and it was during an exam, everyone had finished. He was sound asleep,

and one of my, friends in the front of the room said, stands up and we all left the class, and he and I can.

Oh, I still feel bad to this day, because I can imagine what it was like for him when he woke up. And he's like, and he looks out and the classroom was totally empty. Like, how long have I been out? Where did everybody go? Like, what happened just now? How long has it been? I'll tell you that story because.

I can relate to that spiritually. It's such a picture of my heart that I find myself engaged in my faith. I have as long as I'm standing up and I'm giving a lesson, I'm engaged in a Bible study, or I'm walking with my friends or I'm part of some sort of spiritually dynamic activity. I'm on my feet.

I can feel like God is all around me. He's dripping from the walls. But it's just a matter of time before you got to sit down, before you sit down in that chair and all of a sudden you begin to get lulled to sleep a little bit. And at first I have these moments where I catch myself, oh, I never read my Bible in a while or oh, I haven't, I haven't, I haven't spent enough time in prayer.

Oh, I haven't had these conversations. And, but eventually you fall into this deep, dark, dreamless spiritual sleep. And the problem with us with, with when we fall asleep spiritually, we're not in active. When I fall asleep spiritually, are you fall asleep spiritually? We do all kinds of things. We just do things that we wouldn't normally do when we are.

When we are awake spiritually and we start spiritually sweet. And that's when we realize that we're in that anger that we wrestled with, we thought we had under control, begins to return. Or that secret sin that you've always wrestled. You realize you're not really wrestling it anymore. It's kind of having its way in your life or whatever it is that we contend with.

It's usually those things that we find ourself really deep into those places, and we find ourselves spiritually dry or emotionally, distressed. And it wakes us up and we have that moment where, like, how long have I been out? What happened? How long have I been asleep? And we begin to scramble, think what just happened. And then we vow that I'll never do that again.

Right?

We read our passage like one. The one we read today in, like so many other passages in Scripture. Moments like that get kind of scary because what Jesus seems to be saying here, this is one of those Santa Claus is coming to town passages like, I'm coming back, I know when you're sleeping and know when you're awake, you better be watching.

And Jesus says, stay awake, Jesus, he's coming like I'm. When I second coming, I'm going to come in like a thief in the night. I think to myself, if I'm asleep, if I miss him, I wake up and I see the empty classroom. What do I do? How do I avoid something like this? How do I stay awake?

Good question. We're in the season of advent and this is the season. As we all know, it's the first day of our calendar year for the church, but it's also that we begin to celebrate the Christmas season. We're looking towards the birth of Jesus. And as Episcopalians, we do this. We anticipate the birth of Jesus. But as people that live on this side of the crucifixion, we use this as a time to prepare our hearts.

We also talk about the Second Coming and how do we need to live to anticipate the time that Jesus is going to come back? So we use advent to nurture this anticipation to to kind of break the soil of our hearts, to understand how do we live and how do we stay awake in certain ways. And our passage today in Matthew 24, Jesus is on the mount of Olives, and he's talking to his disciples, and they're talking about the judgment that's coming.

And he. And if you remember a couple weeks ago, we, we talked about this from the section in the book of Luke, but he's talking about the destruction of the temple that's going to happen in 70 A.D. and he says, not one stone is going to be on top of another one. And he keeps going east.

And the disciples are terrified. And they say, how do we know when these things are going to happen? And Jesus says that, that the end starts talking about the end of an age, what we call

the Second Coming. And in verse 36 he says, but about that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the father.

So they ask him, like, when is this going to happen? And Jesus says, no one knows. Not even I know. That seems to be the implication. Now when I read that, I think to myself, wait a second, aren't you Jesus? Like you're fully God? If you're fully God, that means you share in the same qualities of God. You're omniscient, you know all things, and it's a big deal to say you don't know because that's a key attribute of God.

And if you don't truly know that, that means you're not fully God. Is that what you're saying here? That's not what he's saying here. What Jesus is doing here is, is he's talking to his disciples while he is 100% God. He is also 100% human. And in this moment, what Jesus is doing, he's having this instructional time with his disciples.

He's trying to nurture their hearts. He's trying to nurture their perspective, and he's trying to teach them how humanity as a as a person that is fully locked in and dependent on God, how they approach God in a moment like this. So there's these moments in Scripture where we see Jesus sort of flexing his divinity, and then you find other moments in Scripture where Jesus is flexing his humanity and this is one of those moments where he is flexing his humanity for, Philippians two, where he says who he being.

In very nature God made himself nothing by taking on the nature of a servant. He emptied himself. So he's trying to display to these people, how do you relate God to God? And this topic is a human being. So Jesus keeps going and he continues. He's saying that day when my second coming, when it comes, it's going to be like the days of Noah.

So people are going to be eating, I'm going to be drinking, and they're going to be working in the fields, giving themselves in marriage and all the things that they do. And they knew nothing about what was happening until it happened. And then all of a sudden the flood came. And he says, when I when I come back, it's going to be just like that.

There's going to be two people working in the field and one is going to be taken and another, another one's going to be left and it keeps going on. And a couple of illustrations. Now I want, I want to give you a couple points here around what Jesus is talking about here. The first one is this a lot of people read that passage and they think, man, that sounds like the rapture.

This is proof of what? That that's not what this is talking about. What Jesus is not saying is, is Noah enters the ark and was taken away. So believers are going to be taken away at the Second coming and snatched out, and some will be left at the hand. What it is saying, he's saying in the same way, the flood was a surprise and the same way that nobody knew it was coming.

That's the way the Second Coming is going to be. You're going to be going about your everyday business and it's going to come suddenly. It's going to come decisively and it's going to come unexpectedly. And then what Jesus is point in this is also saying, hey, because it's sudden, because it's unexpected. Don't spend your time sitting trying to decipher everything that's going on in the world, trying to anticipate when this is going to happen.

You're not going to solve the Rubik's Cube. There is no X that marks the spot the angels don't know. Human beings weren't meant to know. You are not going to. You're going to know that if you can just decipher this and you don't want to treat Jesus the Second Coming like he's some divine leprechaun, that if you can catch, you're going to get his pot of salvation.

That's not what he's saying. What he's saying is that God is the only one that knows the father is in control. And the more that we try to figure these things out, the more that we make charts. And people do this. They make charts. They measure the number of earthquakes and tragedies and all these things trying to measure when the Second coming is going to be.

I know you've seen this somewhere. What we're trying to do in that moment is we're trying to gain some semblance of control here that I know I can figure it out, and if I can figure it out, I don't have to fully depend and lean in to Jesus, do I? I don't have to lean in. Because the truth is, if God told me the day in the time you know what I would do, I'd negotiate it.

You know, Wednesday is not good. Wednesday is not good for me. It's when he said in the gospel he goes, don't say I have to go bury my father and mother first and then come to me. So we all have our own agendas that will trump that. And what Jesus is saying is the mysteries of this belong to God or alone.

But the deepest point that I think Jesus is making in this passage is this he's warning us about a heart posture. He's saying that. He's saying to us, be aware. And he's pointing to the days of Noah. And it's kind of ironic because he's pointing to the days of Noah talking about the ways that we shouldn't be.

And now, just to frame this, if you ever read Genesis chapter six, where the flood story, the days of Noah were really, really dark. It was a time of deep human depravity. It was a time of spiritual rebellion. It was the likes of which we don't see in our modern age. But that's not what Jesus is pointing to.

He says, in the days of Noah, he's saying that that these people were living in their lives and spiritual oblivion. He was saying they were eating and drinking and getting married. And he's painting this picture of spiritual indifference, not the getting married is bad. That's not what he's saying. He's saying there's this time of spiritual indifference where people are numb and they're a nest, decides by the trivialities or the details of their lives to the point where they are.

They are living in, in complete oblivion to the spiritual realities of God. And the point that Jesus is making this really profound in matters of salvation, indifference is just as bad. Is defiance. It's it'd be like this if I had a disease and you had a disease, and we were standing next to each other and the cure was right in front of me, and I said, you know what?

I don't really care. Whatever. I'm indifferent to it, so I don't take it. And you're defiant, and you said, I will never take any cure that you give me. Who's in a better spot? Neither of us. My indifference is just as bad. Is defiance, my indifference. I'm wandering away from the gift that I've been giving. We are exactly the same.

The only difference in this is that indifference is poison. Because it's sneaky. It's this most sneaky poison that we can ingest spiritually. Because indifference to God is almost always obvious. Skated. We're blinded by our passions for other things and things that we can so easily justify in our lives. This Jesus stuff. I mean, I know it's important and all, but I don't know.

I'm really passionate about my job, and I need to do well because I gotta support my family or my bank account or my entertainment, or I gotta create holiday memories, and I've gotta do this, and I'm not really paying attention to Jesus, or I've got my addictions or whatever it is. These things always justify themselves. The things that that create our spiritual indifference are never things that seem trivial to us.

They're always matters of first importance, and they eventually lull us to sleep. As we've talked about just a couple of weeks ago, if we put anything on the throne instead of Jesus in our indifference, we become more indifferent and we fall deeper into that spiritual sleep. So what do we do when Jesus tells us, verse 42, therefore keep watch.

If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come in an hour when you do not expect him. Keep watch. Okay, now wait a second. I thought Jesus just said a second ago that I'm not supposed to sit and watch the signs and in the sky and try and count the stars and calculate when the second thing is, it was second coming is going to happen.

What am I watching for? What does it mean to keep watch? Also, how do I muster the strength to keep watch? For as someone who knows, I will fall asleep spiritually in a matter of seconds after I sit down? See? The good news here is that keeping watch isn't about putting toothpicks under my spiritual eyelids. It's not about me walking in fear and anxiety that I don't miss something that's hiding or trying to surprise me.

What keeping watch is living in an awareness of myself and living in an awareness of who Jesus is. Or another way of saying that is that to keep watch is to live with a heart posture of repentance. What is repentance? This is a word we hear a lot. It's when we especially live in a north floor. You can see it spray painted on, pieces of plywood on the side of the road.

It says repent, the Lord's coming. And it's got all these negative, scary connotations, I think, when I say it and I think what when Scripture, it's written in Scripture, here's what I mean. See, in this passage, Jesus is drawn on the days of Noah. What is he saying? He's saying there are two people standing in the field. One is taken away and one is left behind.

What's the difference between those two people? They're both equally busy in the field. They're both functionally living the same life. They're both working away. It's not saying one was watching for the signs in the other one wasn't. The difference between those two people is that one of them was spiritually awake and the other one wasn't. How? See, I don't know that person's story, but I know I fall asleep and I know about spiritual slumber, and I know how God wakes us up.

I know how God gets my attention, and I know how God gets your attention. And let me tell you this, it's rarely through fame and fortune is it God? It rarely gets your attention through vacations.

And peace and comfort. It's usually through pain, isn't it? The way the Lord wakes up and rattles our cages. This is C.S. Lewis said. Pain is God's megaphone to arouse a deaf world. Some of you I know are going through hard times. Some of you who've been through them, and some of you are going to be going through them soon.

I don't know, and I'm not being cavalier about this just by saying, oh, your hard times or your pain, or the thing you've lost or the thing that you're going through, that's just God's trying to get your attention. That would be cavalier. And that's not what I'm saying, because I can't speak to God's reason for why his core purposes, and how and why he allows pain in our lives.

But I can tell you this because I know the Lord and I know this. I know his Scripture as if we let him and we lean into it, he will always use our trials to deepen our hearts and to get our attention. If we let him. My encouragement to you is this don't waste your pain because you're all going to get it.

We all are dealing with it, but don't waste our pain. We need to lean into it lest we miss the blessing that the Lord has in it for us. If it's financial hardships, how do I lean into it and see the ways that I depend on the things of this world, rather than the provision of God? If it's in my marriage, how is it that in your marriage that you might be looking to that person to be for you, that what Jesus can only be?

We all do this if it's in your physical health or your family issues, whatever it is. I'm not saying that it's we need to we need to look at our own hearts. But I'm not saying it's all your fault, but what I am saying is, in the chaos of these things, if we begin to look at this and we begin to focus on what is ours and let the Lord reveal our heart postures, we begin that we we begin to step into the first part of that journey of repentance.

And that was where we become profoundly self-aware, profoundly self-aware of our inability, profound, profoundly self-aware of our lack of the things we need and of the things that we cannot provide on our own, on our own accord, because repentance, it focuses on our own hearts. But repentance also makes us run towards Jesus. It's easy to think about what is repentance mean.

It's so common to think that repentance is just stopping the thing that we shouldn't be doing, stopping the behavior and turning away from the thing that is going to bring destruction in my life. But the bottom line is the true power of repentance is not what we are turning away from, but what we are turning towards. You think of stories like the prodigal son.

What's the power of the prodigal son story? The fact that he stood up from the pigsty and he turned away from the pigs? Know the power of the prodigal son wasn't what he was turning away from. It was what he was turning towards. He was turning towards the embrace of the father, and he ran to the father. And what did you discover as he turned towards the grace of the father?

It was the father that was running towards him. And the father comes and embraces him, and it says he falls on his neck.

Here we are. And we go on this journey of repentance. And the Holy Spirit begins to break the soil of your hearts in trials and the pain in your life and the things that that are difficult for you, that you would never, ever, ever have chosen or written into your story on your own. You never would have done it.

And we see that, and we begin to see our need, and we lift our eyes and we look for a Savior and see Jesus here. He's talking about this, this his second coming, and he's describing it like a thief coming in. But I got to tell you, it's not a scary thing. The thief that's coming is not a scary thing because we've met this thief before.

We've met this thief. He broke into history in the person of Christ at his birth, at Christmas. Not to steal what you need. He broke into history to take away what is killing you. He came in to take and steal what is killing you. He came to take sin. He came to take death. Our self-righteousness, our idols, our narcissism.

And what he leaves behind is his life, his righteousness, His Holy Spirit, his goodness, his very presence. So how do we stay awake? It's people that have this spiritual sleep disorder that when we sit, our eyes begin to roll back in our head. We realize that we might sleep, but Jesus does not.

Jesus does not. He doesn't fall asleep. In Gethsemane. We do. Jesus tends the fire for us. He does not fall asleep. And we live our lives with open hands saying, your power, not mine.

Your sufficiency, not mine, your resolve. Not mine. Your ability to stay awake, not mine. And that gives me what it gives me. The freedom to rest in this time when I close my eyes in this place, I'm not reclining into the emptiness in the bankruptcy of this world. But I'm reclining into the arms of a Savior who says, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and need rest.

That is our Jesus. That is the one who's coming like a thief in the night. And that is how we tune our hearts to him. It is God's. It is not God's. It's not anxiety and fear that leads us to repentance. It's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. And when I think of a Jesus like that, I can stay awake for him.

And where I can't, I know he stays awake for me and will rouse me with His Spirit in the right ways at the right time. So I will be aware and I will be ready. Amen.