

“See and Share the Glory”
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Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, Virginia
Last Sunday after the Epiphany – 14 February 2010
Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 3:12 – 4:2; Luke 9:28-36

To see the glory of God, we must stay awake. On the mountain with Jesus, Peter and James and John were sleepy, but somehow they managed to stay awake. Otherwise, they might have missed out on one of the most amazing sights of their lives. As they stood there, Jesus was transformed into a figure of blazing white, talking with Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Jewish faith. Had they fallen asleep, that memory might not exist. They would have missed out on an extraordinary opportunity, and maybe we would have, too, because those three disciples were the only witnesses. We might not know the story of the transfiguration of Jesus if they had dozed off at the crucial moment.

Likewise, we need to stay awake. We need to keep vigil, because one never knows when the glory of God will be revealed. Of course, we don't have trouble staying awake. If anything, we've got the opposite problem. Too many people get too little sleep. Studies have shown it, but if you don't believe the government and the universities, turn on your television at night, and watch the commercials for products designed to help people turn out the lights. We need more, not less of that physically healing, mentally refreshing sleep, but we desperately need to stay awake in a different way. We need to stay awake spiritually. Unfortunately, if our souls came equipped with snooze buttons, many people would have long since worn them thin.

All too often, we fall asleep to the spiritual reality that forms the heart of the world around us. Nobody's to blame. We can only keep track of a limited number of

things at any given time. How can we stay spiritually awake, when we have to be alert to so many other things: my cell phone's ringing, my e-mail's pinging, the TV is warning me that I eat too much and sleep too little and don't own enough of this or that; cable news needs me to know that my kids might be stolen, and if that doesn't get them, the killer mold in my house or the lurking terrorist cell down the street most certainly will. I've got bills to pay and dragons to slay, but when it comes time to pray, there's no time. There's no time. I'm spiritually asleep. Can you connect with what I'm saying?

So how do we stay awake? Well, like all those other things that consume our time and energy, it takes effort. I wish somebody else could do that hard work for me. I wish as your priest that I could do that hard work for you, but I can't do it for you anymore than somebody else can do it for me. I can pray for *you*, but I can't pray *for* you.

We've got to stay awake, but how do we do that? It takes a change. Priorities must shift. Perceptions must shift. How we look at the world and our lives, and the decisions we make on the basis of what we see in both, must change. And we've taken the first step haven't we? Here we are gathered together for a single purpose: to pray. That's a good start, but this is only one day of the week. What's happens tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that? How are we going to connect with God when we aren't surrounded by others to support us, when we don't have a specific time and place to go and simply be with God?

It takes commitment. It takes a covenant between God and yourself. Each day I will pray in a meaningful way. That's the commitment, but how to keep it? Actually, let's back up a step. How do we remember the commitment we mean to keep? Go home

and pick up pen, paper, Scotch tape, and a pair of scissors. Cut up the paper into several small strips, and on each one write the same sentence: “I will pray today in a meaningful way.” Then take those pieces of paper and stick one on your refrigerator door, just strap it to the handle, and then every time you open the refrigerator door, which I suspect most of us do multiple times each day, you’ll be reminded, and you can say a little prayer right then, “Jesus, just as I take time each day to eat, help me to take time each day to pray, so that my soul can be as full as my belly.”

Put another piece of paper on your dashboard, and every time you stop at a red light, read those words out loud, “I will pray today in a meaningful way,” and say another little prayer: “Jesus, just as I am faithful to stopping at red lights,” and I hope you are, “please make me faithful to the daily practice of prayer.”

Put a piece of paper on your bathroom mirror, and every time you brush your hair – assuming you have some – or each time you brush your teeth or put on your makeup or shave off the stubble, pray to God, “Make me as faithful to prayer as I am to what I’m doing right now.” It doesn’t come much more practical than that. If you pray each day for God to increase your eagerness to pray, God will answer. And that’s what you have to watch out for, because once you start praying, you are going to wake up, and what you wake up to might surprise and disturb you.

You are going to witness a beauty and experience a peace that is at odds with a world sorely lacking in both. And guess what that’s going to do? It’s going to make you want to stop praying, but keep on, because over time, the peace of God will help you settle down when you see the contrast between what God has to offer and the way the world is. The more awake you become, the better you will be able to see, and you’ll see

better because you will be more enlightened, and if you keep at this prayer business long enough, you find out that the light is coming from God through you, which leads us to another challenge.

This is where Moses can help. He went up on a mountain, much like Peter and James and John did with Jesus, and God was present with Moses on that mountaintop. Moses spent so much time with God that a little sliver of God's glory rubbed off on him, and when Moses came down the mountain, his face was shiny in a supernatural way that freaked people out. So he put on a veil to mute the glow so they would calm down, which at that time and place was a good leadership decision.

But St. Paul gives us different advice in his second letter to the Corinthians. When the light of God starts to shine through us, Paul insists that the veil be cast aside, because the time has come for people to see that light, whether it frightens them or not. We shine the light, because Jesus calls us to share light, and to share the glory of God, we must "act with boldness."

How many times have we understandably concealed the light of God that yearns to shine through us? There are countless ways we do this: false modesty will hide the light; letting it slide when an opportunity for witness arises hides the light; leaving well enough alone when well enough means someone is living their life without God will hide the light.

We need to overcome our squeamishness and summon our courage and let the light shine forth in everything we do, because until we do, we will be prisoners of our fears, slaves to the opinions of others. I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind when he went willingly to the cross. As St. Paul put it, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is

freedom,” but as Benjamin Franklin put it, “Those who desire safety over freedom deserve neither.”

God created us to be free, not to do whatever we want, but to do whatever He wants, and when we cower in fear and hide the light, it’s like a child who opens a gift to find the toy she’s always dreamed of having, and then she refuses to play with it. Play with your freedom. Enjoy it. Christ gave us freedom freely, but it didn’t come cheap.

What does shining the light look like in our daily lives? Look around and you might find people who are enviable, not because of their wealth or their status or their physical appearance, but because of a quality of character that escapes easy definition. It’s attractive but in a spiritual way. We want to be like them. We want to have what they have, and the good news is that anybody can have it. Anybody willing to stay awake and commit to prayer and let the light of God shine forth; anybody can be that person: slow to anger, forgiving, perceptive, peaceful, free. And it’s our job to make sure that everybody has a chance to be that anybody.

When’s the last time you invited somebody to Church? It doesn’t have to be on a Sunday morning. Bring them to the pancake supper Tuesday night. They won’t think you’re a bad person for asking. They might say no, but that’s just an opportunity to practice handling rejection with grace and style. They might say no, and then wind up here two weeks, two months, or two years down the line. Plant a seed. It may go to waste, but if it does, God will give you more seed to plant, more light to shine.

To see the glory of God, we must stay awake. Go home and make your pieces of paper. Remind yourself to pray. Ask God to give you the grace to be as faithful in

prayer as you are in front of your bathroom mirror or at a stoplight or with the fond relationship we all share with the kitchen refrigerator.

To share the glory of God, we must “act with great boldness,” unafraid, daring, and at peace with the knowledge that no measure of embarrassment can match the pleasure Jesus feels when we try to share the Gospel with one of his beloved children.

You want to feel spiritually alive? Stay awake, pray every day, take courage, and see and share the glory of God. Amen.