

Can You Stay Awake?
John 13:1-17
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Maundy Thursday - April 9, 2009

The lectionary scripture for tonight is about Jesus washing the Disciples' feet. However, the scripture I want to focus on tells what happens after Jesus and the Disciples left the supper--it is not included in John's gospel, but is in the other three. Reading from Matthew 26:36-46 (read).

During Lent, Nora and I have been teaching a class with the sub-title: *Learning from the Disciples' Mistakes*. It seems as if those poor guys could never grab a ticket on the clue bus. Jesus would explain things to them, but it seemed they never "got it." I can relate to most of their mistakes--as a matter of fact, I have been guilty of many of them. And this one is for sure one with which I can relate, because I love to take naps. I take a nap every Sunday afternoon--and any other day I can work one in. I can sleep on airplanes with no problem. I'm usually asleep before the flight attendant tells us to buckle our seat belts. I really like those studies that say about how naps are good things. One of my favorite scriptures is the one about Jesus and the Disciples being at sea in a storm and Jesus isn't worried at all because he is in the bow sleeping. This is one of the times I ask myself, "what would Jesus do?" and can honestly answer, "I can do that!" So I can relate with the Disciples who couldn't stay awake while Jesus prayed.

And what a prayer it was. Think of the situation in which Jesus found himself that night. He knew Judas was going to betray him, that Peter was going to deny him and the others were going to desert him. He knew that the time was at hand for him to be handed over to the authorities, and yet, he needed the Disciples to wait and watch with him while he prayed fervently that there be another way. He wasn't asking the Disciples to DO anything to change the outcome, he was only asking that they sit with him while he prayed.

I can think of at least two things we can learn from this scripture. First, during Lent, we have an opportunity to be with Jesus in a contemplative, sacrificial way. Attending the service tonight as well as the one tomorrow night are ways of watching with Jesus. When we celebrate Easter without experiencing Lent and Holy Week we don't get the full impact of the resurrection. Jesus said we must die in order to be born again. We must experience Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion to have a true understanding and appreciation of the resurrection.

This scripture also teaches us how we can be supportive of others who are going through trying times. So often we wish we could DO something to change the outcome of a situation or say something to ease the pain, but notice that all Jesus asked of his Disciples was to "sit here while I go over there and pray." And to Peter, James, and John he asked them to "remain here and stay awake with me."

Being with our loved ones during hard times is really the best thing we can do. It is called a ministry of presence.

Eighteen years ago, I learned the lesson of not procrastinating that ministry of presence. There was a member of St. John who had suffered a stroke before I knew her. She remained active at church even though she was in a wheel chair and couldn't speak. Her name was Irene. Subsequently, she and her husband moved to Washington State and not long after that he died unexpectedly and she moved to a convalescent center in Centralia. That winter, I was visiting a friend in Portland and decided to drive up there to see her. She had gone out for lunch so I went shopping for a few hours and came back. She was so delighted to see someone from her church--she showed me the Valentines one of our Sunday School classes had sent her, I took pictures of us together, and we had a great visit. When I got back to Anchorage, a few days later, I learned that she had passed away. You can only imagine how grateful I was that I had decided to visit without delay--although I had been tempted when she wasn't there initially. A few months later, my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I had just been to see her the week before and her surgeon told me she had 8 to 18 months to live.

But I remembered what I had learned from Irene. Don't delay a visit. I flew home the next week and ten days after Mama's diagnosis, she died in my arms.

Jesus said, "remain here and stay awake with me." Friends, when you need to spend time with Jesus, do it now. When you need to spend time with your family or friends who are going through difficult times, do it now. It may be sitting beside the bed while your child goes back to sleep after a nightmare. It may be listening to your teen-ager sob when her first boyfriend broke her heart. It may be having lunch with your friend while she waits to hear the results of medical tests. It may be taking some food to a young couple who has just experienced a miscarriage. It may be listening to a friend tell stories about a parent who has just died. It may be encouraging a person who has just lost their job. Jesus said, "whenever you do this to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it for me." When you are waiting and watching with your family and friends during trying times you are waiting and watching with Jesus. And Jesus will reciprocate. The last words Jesus said before he ascended into heaven, were "and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Tomorrow is Good Friday. The service is in the evening at 9. Be here to wait and watch with Jesus so that on the day of Resurrection you will know that you have been a faithful Disciple and can celebrate fully life with Christ.