

## Awake for What?

Sermon Notes for Nov 12, 2017 at Brentwood – Remembrance Week Service

Ps 70 (521) & Matthew 25:1-13 (905)



**Keep awake, therefore,  
for you know neither the day nor the hour.  
(Matt 25:13)**

### Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

I'm with Terry Wells on this one – I've always had trouble figuring this story out – there's more here that I understand at this point – the main quandary for me is the idea that some are excluded by a God revealed in Jesus as a God of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion – but we'll take up that quandary and ponder it some more in a couple of weeks when we consider the parable of the Sheep and the Goats

This week, I want to focus a bit more on the audience for whom Matthew's gospel was compiled – most likely, the Christian gatherings in Antioch – first circulated in the 80s CE – a city of 150–200,000 – capital of the Roman province of Syria – on the empire's eastern frontier – strong military presence – used to suppress revolts in Judea and Galilee, from which many of the city's inhabitants had come – a heavily militarized society imposing pacification with violence

The *ecclesia* in Antioch were a loose network of groups who followed Jesus' interpretation of Israel's traditions and practices – in conflict with other Judean over Judaism as it took shape following the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE – probably in conflict among themselves as they emphasized and interpreted the teachings of Jesus and the apostles differently – all around a common confession that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord – but, as a careful reading of the collection of writings that we call the New Testament shows, lots of differences among them about what that means and how it should be communicated

For Matthew's community, God's just and life-giving purposes were being more clearly revealed and established in the mission, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus as a judgment on an alternative to the Roman imperial order – Matthew's gospel, as a whole, is written to help people be awake to the inbreaking reality of God's Commonwealth – a world of justice, peace, and joy in stark contrast to a world of violation and vengeance – spreading invasively, like mustard bushes, through small communities around the known world who simply act differently – live an alternative social reality - so, these small gatherings are facing increasing repression and persecution – Ps 70, with its plea for God to protect against enemies, would have resonated with them – it's a prayer, really, for the strength and wisdom to stay awake for the coming Commonwealth of God – to be that community in the world, but not of the world, until God brings about the full completion of God's redemption of the cosmos – what, then are we to stay awake for? – what should the focus of our wakefulness be?

*Notes for a sermon preached by Brian Fraser,  
minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC*

- Be awake for the light of God's love in the midst of the darkness of our despair – devilry and destruction feed on such despair – God's quiet, but insistent, grace sheds rays of redemptive light into the fear-gripped depths of our souls and our societies – finding hope in that light and carrying it with grateful courage into the darkness of our collective despair is always the next step in following Jesus
- In the strength of that hope, be awake for ways of breaking apart the cycle of violation and violence that plagues so many communities of human beings in our world today – the traumatic reason so many are fleeing beloved homelands that no longer provide a base for compassion, prosperity, and safety – in small ways, like mustard seeds – 'thoughts and prayers' – 'clean, dry socks' – 'an inspiring concert' - 'a warm smile' - 'an authentic welcome' – 'an honest dialogue' - seeing our churches as places in our society where the Commonwealth already exists, is being nourished, and is invading all the circles of influence touch by its participants
- In the strength of those convictions, be awake for companionship and alliances with those who have caught a glimpse, however confused and clouded it may be, of the glory/energy of God's salvation in Jesus Christ – seeking out those who are doing justice, loving kindness, and walking, however hesitantly, humbly with their Creator – seeing them as fellow travelers with Jesus Christ on the road home to a forgiving Father in a celebrating Commonwealth

### **So, what are we going to do with this ...**

How do you wake up in the morning? – what are the first thoughts that take shape in your soul? – what would happen if those words were some version of 'do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8)? – ponder that – give it a try for this coming week – see how it sheds God's light on the way you see the world and your contribution to it

**Note:** *The image used for this sermon was painted last year by our youngest grandchild, Chloe Fergusson. Thanks for her permission to use it here.*

### **Your Notes ...**