

Isaiah 51:4-6

4 “Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. **5** My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. **6** Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

Jude 20-25

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Mark 13: 24-37

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Stay Awake in Christ

In looking at our Gospel lesson for this morning, I am stuck by Jesus telling us to “stay awake” three times. Remember from last week Jesus is talking about the times leading up to Judgement Day. While in English we see three “Stay Awakes,” in Greek it is three different words. So let’s

look one kind of awake that can be like when you get up, drowsy but awake. However, based on our Lord's words in the Gospel lesson, Jesus is not content with us just sitting around simply awake as the tribulations and labor pains of this fallen and sinful world increase a little more every day. So there's a difference between one "staying awake" and another. Of course, this only makes sense to us, right? There are times when we are awake and other times when we need to stay more awake, like driving, working, hunting, sitting in church. Sometimes though you need to stay awake, stay alert, and be on guard, no matter how tired or worn out you feel. Sometimes, like when soldiers are on patrol, our safety is dependent on our alertness and vigilance. A moment of not being "fully awake" can prove disastrous for you and for everyone entrusted to your care.

It is with this simple understanding that we turn the lessons three "Stay awake!" While all three words mean basically the same thing. Christ's commands in verses 33, 35, and 37 are prime examples show us that they carry a different sense when we examine these words in the original Greek. Then you can't help but notice that there is a certain progression that our English simply fails to capture and convey.

As I already pointed out there's a difference between simply looking at something with opened eyes and being on-guard and keeping watch. Being on-guard and keeping watch is definitely a step-up from simply being a spectator. The senses are heightened, and you're more aware of what's going on around you. The situation is definitely more "real" and important when you're on guard. This is how Jesus begins His commands in verse 33. In just two words, "keep awake" and "be on guard" (the English actually flips it around), He takes us from being awake and simply observing the various labor pains and signs that the end draws near to commanding active vigilance, be on-guard because of the reality that the end draws near. Think about it from a normal work-day perspective. Technically, when the alarm goes off at the crack of dawn you're awake, right? Your eyes are open. You're not sleeping. You're not dreaming. After that alarm goes off you're not supposed to go back to sleep either. Keep awake! Now, even though you're technically awake, are you as awake as you would be after a shower and a cup of coffee? This is the subtle little difference between "awake and observant," and "awake and active and on-guard."

Interestingly enough, Jesus steps it up even more with His next commands in verses 35 & 37 when He says, "Stay awake!" This Greek word that Jesus uses is special. The word used here is a word often translated as "resurrected" (e.g. Jesus awaked Lazarus from the dead; Jesus was awaked on Easter Sunday). So what does this mean? Let me explain. This is a tense of Greek that indicates that the thought is that something has happened to someone or something in the past and the resultant present condition is now being described. For example, let's use the verb "tie," as in "I tie my shoelace." Past tense, "I tied my shoelace." That doesn't mean that it's still tied. It means that at one time in the past I tied my shoelace. In this Greek tense it would sound something like this: "I have tied my shoelace in the past, with the result that my shoelace is now still tied." That verb for

resurrection would sound something like this: "You have been resurrected from the dead, with the result that you are now alive. You are no longer dead."

So...how does all this work with the command to "stay awake?" When Jesus commands in verses 35 & 37 that we are to "stay awake," He is not simply commanding someone to keep a "heads-up." He is commanding us to actually behave like the living, already resurrected unto new life Christians that we are right now. We're not to act like the rest of the fools who are dead in their faith. Like St. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "**We grieve, but we do not grieve like those who have no hope.**" We're different. We know the Truth. We have been baptized and resurrected into this blessed truth. And what does this resurrected new life look like and sound like? My brothers and sisters in Christ, it's nothing more than trust in God above all things, even when times are bad. As I said last week, Jesus is not teaching us how to foretell the future. He's teaching faithfulness in the midst of trial and tribulation and despair. Stay faithful!

This fact becomes clearer when we see that this same exact command is also used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal. He commands Peter, James, and John to "stay awake, keep watch and pray with Me." Jesus then goes off to pray, and what happens when Jesus returns? He finds the three men fast asleep; just resting their eyes. "Could you not "stay awake/keep watch" for even one single hour? "Keep watch/stay awake" and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Do you see the difference? Jesus did truly "stay awake," vigilantly in His faith and trust. His soul was deeply troubled and worried. As almighty God, He knew what was going to happen. He didn't run though. His vigilance took Him right to His Heavenly Father in prayer and trust. Notice, too, that His vigilance and alertness wasn't just self-centered. He stayed awake for His disciples too; the very men who sought to steal a little sleep while they had a chance. Is it any wonder that when "the going got tough and frightening," the sleepy heads fled off into the night while Jesus willingly and obediently submitted to the will of His Heavenly Father?

Why is all this important to point out? Why would Jesus use these specific words with their ascending meanings, and—more importantly—why should we make such a big deal out of it today? Well, consider the context. We all have questions and concerns about end-times. The disciples were no different. Their questions sound just like our questions today: "What's it gonna be like? When will it happen? Will it hurt? Will I suffer? Will it be quick or will it be a long and drawn-out process?" My fellow believers: Jesus' command to "stay awake; to be and stay resurrected and on-guard" still holds true today! He still speaks to us! Yes, the signs that the end draws near are all around us. They've always been all around us, from the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden to the terrifying events of Good Friday to today.

However, our Lord's command remains the same: Stay awake! Be observant. Be faithfully vigilant. Be on guard. Be resurrected. You have already been resurrected in the waters of Holy Baptism from the death of sin into new life in Christ. The result of such a wonderful, complete gift of life and forgiveness should be nothing more than trust in your Lord, above all things, even when those things are frightening, painful, and full of sorrow! Don't act like or sound like those who are asleep in deadly unbelief, running around this world in fear with their eyes.

Open your eyes! Look to the cross of Jesus. Look to the reality that is already yours in Christ Jesus. Because of Christ Jesus, you have complete and eternal forgiveness, right now. In Holy Baptism, God has already given you Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil. And through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in this life-giving Word and Sacrament, God is continually nourishing and feeding your saving faith.

Now as we close out this church year and prepare to enter into a new, penitential season of Advent, I pray that God continue to grant you these opened and vigilant eyes of a living, saving faith so that even as the times get tougher you may always recognize the joy, the peace, and the life that is already and eternally yours in Christ Jesus.

To Him alone be all glory, all praise, and all honor.

AMEN

