

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon

Date: 3 March 2019

Lesson: Luke 9:28-36 Transfiguration Year C

---

The commercial begins with a skyline image of city, silhouetted by the pre-dawn light barely illuminating the horizon. Then there are various shots of different people in their beds asleep. A light electric guitar riff begins to play in the background. *Ba-da-baaa, ba, ba, ba-da-baaa. Ba-da-baaa, ba, ba, ba-da.* One by one these individuals begin to wake up, turn off their alarm clocks, rub their eyes, and slowly get out of bed. The sun is barely touching the horizon as we see these people now doing stretches or tying their shoes. We begin to recognize that some of these people are professional athletes -- Tom Brady, Alex Rodriguez -- but most of them are just everyday people: teenagers and adults. A drumset starts keeping a basic beat with that guitar riff as we see these people taking those first, slow steps of a morning run, or preparing themselves before serving the first tennis ball, or laying on a surfboard to swim out to the breaking waves. The music escalates into a full-on rock-n-roll song just as the sun fully emerges over the horizon and all of athletes -- professional and amateur -- take off into the sport of their choice.

This Nike commercial -- titled "Awake" -- received rave reviews when it was first released in 2006. The message of the commercial is that as important as sleep is, there are some things -- like athletic aspirations -- that are worth waking up for. Pastor Ginger is my witness that I have used that commercial's song for my alarm clock every morning for years. She probably hates it by now.

Even when we want to sleep, there are some things worth waking for. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each depict the Transfiguration of our Lord. Yet,

only Luke, shares a unique detail. As Jesus is transfigured, we read this detail today: “Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw [Jesus’] glory and the two men who stood with him.” Even when we want to sleep, there are some things worth waking for.

We can sympathize with these disciples. We have all had that experience of bodily fatigue. Our calendars are packed solid with events and expectations. Our jobs demand more and more of our time and energy. Our social engagements stretch us out too thin. At the end of the day, we can be exhausted. We know -- all too well -- that feeling of being weighed down by sleep. We can picture Peter, James, and John with heavy, nodding heads after their trek up the mountain, and we say, “Uh-huh. We’ve been there.”

I still wonder why Luke would include this detail. Three disciples struggling to stay awake is not necessary to the overall narrative; Mark and Matthew’s versions of the story do just fine without it. I believe Luke includes it to make a subtle point: being awake is enough. Being awake is enough to have an encounter with God. It is easy to find voices -- Christian or otherwise -- that say to have an encounter with the divine you need to do something. Go on this pilgrimage. Breathe a certain way. Use a special mantra in your prayers. Consume this substance. Wear this crystal. The message comes in so many forms, but the theme is clear: you have to do something to encounter God. Yet the true gospel of Christianity is not that you can reach God by following certain steps. The true gospel is that God reaches us. God comes to us. We don’t find God, making our way to the divine; God finds us... in Jesus Christ.

Luke seems to be saying that these three disciples were able to witness this transfiguration event because they managed to stay awake. To keep their eyes open.

The implied flip side is that those three could have slept through this transfiguration, never to realize the divine activity taking place all around them simply because their eyes had been shut to it. Luke shares this detail because packed within it is something more than a mention of three men's drowsiness. We can hear this detail in the story as instruction for all disciples, throughout time. You and I don't need to do something to have an encounter with God. God is already bringing that encounter to us. We are surrounded by these encounters. The question, though, is if our eyes are open to them. Do we have our eyes open to witnessing God's encounter with us in the ordinary things of life, or are our eyes shut to these encounters within the ordinary?

Ordinary things like worship. We proclaim that in worship all heaven opens up, like it did on that mountain of the transfiguration. In worship we say that our voices join with the saints of all time -- the angels and archangels too -- giving praise to the Lamb who chooses to encounter us at the table. Are we "awake" to this reality? Are we keeping our eyes open to this? Or do we miss this reality of God acting all around us because our eyes are shut to it? Of course those are questions of faith. It requires some faith to be open to the possibility that God is up to something more than the objective reality that everyone can see. It is faith that begs us to witness and accept this world we live in for all its joys and its sorrows, its celebrations and its laments, and yet then also have our eyes open to the new world of God's reign, where tears are no more and the whole of creation is restored. Faith asks us to be awake to both of these realities. To keep our eyes open to God acting in both.

Transfiguration Sunday is a fitting day for us to discuss being awake to the activity of God taking place around us. Because when we look at all the special days that the Church celebrates, this day -- Transfiguration Sunday -- has a unique balance

to it. We see balance this day in a story that offers appearances by characters from the Old and New Testaments, which points us to the past roots of our faith as well as to God's future. God is active in both. We find balance in the Church calendar because uniquely on this day we can look back to our festivities of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, and we can also look forward to the journeys of Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. God is active in both. Finally, Transfiguration Sunday highlights a balance in our life of faith. In the narrative, we hear the voice of God hearken back to the words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism, while also we find Jesus introducing us to Moses and Elijah. This points us back to our baptism that eternally binds us to Christ's baptism, his death and his resurrection. Yet it also points us forward to our funeral, when we can join Moses and Elijah in the world that is to come. This transfiguration story is a snapshot of the fullness of God's promises: those promises first made to us through the baptismal waters, as well as the fruition of those promises upon our death.

Luke would have us ask: Are we awake to this? Do we have eyes that are open to imagining how God is active in the ordinary parts of life? Can our eyes imagine that as you and I gather around this altar, we are experiencing a foretaste of the feast to come? Can our eyes imagine that we are met at this table by God's future? A future where people from all walks of life will celebrate with angels and archangels at the banquet that our Lord has prepared for us. Don't be asleep to divine encounters amongst the ordinary. Keep your eyes open to it. This is something worth staying awake for. Amen.