

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who bids us to stay awake, our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

What's the longest you've ever stayed awake? 24 hours? 48 hours? Longer? When Saddam Hussain invaded Kuwait back on August 2nd, 1990, I was on the first plane that landed in the middle east to kick off operation DESERT SHIELD, which became DESERT STORM. I landed in Saudi Arabia on August 8th. The last time I slept was the evening of August 7th and once in country I didn't sleep for 3 more days. If I remember correctly, I went for 5 days without sleep. I was so tired it physically hurt. More recently I was put on a prescription of Prednisone for inflammation to the tissue surrounding my heart. The prednisone did the trick on curing the inflammation, but one of the side effects is insomnia. Once again, I was having real trouble sleeping. In my experience the longer you go without sleep, the less effective you are at performing routine tasks and eventually, you pose a threat to yourself and those around you. The world record for staying awake belongs to Toimi Soini from Finland (276 hours)! That's more than 11 days! The Guinness Book of World Records deleted Toime's record in 1989 because of fears that trying to break the record for staying awake would cause irreparable harm to anyone attempting to stay awake that long. Sleep deprivation can cause you to make poor decisions. It can lead to hallucinations and

cause depression and thoughts of suicide. If deprived of sleep for long enough, you will die.

If skipping sleep can lead to loss of memory, high blood pressure, obesity, slurred speech, and so many other health problems, why is Jesus telling us to stay awake? First of all, Jesus isn't saying to any one individual to stay awake. In the Greek language there's a difference between the singular you and the plural you. A much better translation would be "All of you, stay awake!" You, Trinity Congregation, stay alert to what's happening all around you!" So, Jesus is telling his disciples not to go through life like a sleep walker without seeing or noticing what's going on all around us. It's time for us to open not only our eyes, but also our spirits so that we can be aware of how God is moving and guiding us through our lives. He's also telling his disciples to be alert to all the ways God is moving in the world so we can be ready to respond to any and all needs that might arise.

Jesus isn't so much telling us to never shut our eyes as he is telling us not to close down our spirits. How often do we go through our day on autopilot? Have you ever driven home from work and realized you're pulling into your driveway and you have no idea how you got there? I've done that many times. We can easily move through our day as though in a dream. We can interact with screens from morning to night while completely avoiding any interaction with another human being, not to mention the Holy One. We can be plugged into one device or

another and fill our eyes and minds with news and images, never leaving room for a whisper of the Spirit or a nudge from a guiding and loving God. We can be lulled into complacency by watching endless loops of music videos or reruns of our favorite TV shows. Mine's NCIS, what's yours? We immerse ourselves in an ocean of meaningless internet eye candy that invites us to click from one link to another. Minutes and even hours can go by before we realize this was perhaps not the best use of our time. Wake up! What did we miss while we were gazing at yet another episode of Gunsmoke or filling another basket of vegetables on Farmville? In an age when it's possible to have your eyes glued to some screen or another almost 24/7, it may be time to wake up to other possibilities.

Jesus talks about a God who will surprise us by coming when we're not looking or arriving in a disguise we don't expect. This powerful Advent passage reminds us to be aware the God who came into the world as a baby so many years ago still wishes to enter our lives today. Too often we find ourselves with the innkeeper, who turns away the Christ with the words, "no room." Our minds are full, our calendars are packed, our expectations are low, so we're not actively looking and seeking for the living Christ in our midst. We're too busy and our minds are too occupied; without even noticing we push Jesus away. And Jesus cries, "Wake up!"

What miracles are we missing because our minds are overloaded with so much stuff, we're simply too distracted to notice the God in our midst? What blessings are we passing by because our minds are consumed with endless details? Are we blindly stumbling through our lives unaware of God's presence all around us? Jesus' words sound almost like a lament or a mournful plea when we consider what we might be missing. "Wake up," Jesus cries. "God is all around you." Wake up you are not alone, Emmanuel pleads. Wake up I will comfort you and give you peace. Wake up, I will be your strength Jesus says. Wake up I have a blessing for you right here, right now! Wake up, says Jesus, I am God - Emmanuel. Can you see me, right here, with you, even now?

Jesus is nudging our souls awake and asking us to open our eyes to what is true -- God is breaking into the world. Advent reminds us of the Emmanuel, the Good News that God is with us. Advent is a time of increased awareness. We aren't college students and Jesus isn't telling us to break out the coffee, energy drinks and NoDoz so we can pull an all-nighter. He is instead, calling us, inviting us to be aware of the needs all around us and of the presence of the living God to help us in our need. It's a call to action today (wake up -- now) instead of tomorrow. Let's not sleep our lives away but instead roll up our sleeves and answer the call to share the hope of God-with-us.

The extraordinary good news of Advent is that God chooses to be with us. God enters into our world desiring a relationship with us. The bad news is that we are often unaware of this miracle. The season of Advent can be a time when we take Jesus' call to "wake up" to heart. We can turn off our computer and tear ourselves away from email so that we can look for God in the people and the places all around us.

May Jesus be real for you this Advent. May the presence of the living God bless your life and give you peace. May we stay awake together, to be in the moment, so we can see this miracle of God breaking into our world to bring peace and salvation to all people. Amen.