**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Stay Awake”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

November 24, 2024

*Mark 13:33-37*

One summer in college, a friend and I decided that we would drive from Sheboygan Wisconsin to the Grand Tetons in Wyoming and go backpacking. The problem was that we were limited in both money and time. We only had a week before we had to be back in town for our summer jobs. It was about 20 hours of driving from Sheboygan, so we decided that we would do it in one shot. We would give ourselves 24 hours total to do the trip. We left very early one morning and decided we would do 6-hour shifts; one person would try to sleep while the other drove.

It seemed like a great plan until it was nighttime, and it was my turn to drive. I quickly found out I was not a good nighttime driver. I lasted about 2 hours before I had to give up because I was falling asleep. My friend ended up driving the last 9 or so hours in the night while I tried my best and failed to stay awake next to him. Lesson learned! On the way back, I drove from before the sun rose until a few hours after it set, and he finished the rest.

I don’t know if you know this, but being awake behind the wheel of a car is the most important part of driving. Otherwise, you and everyone in the car are in a lot of danger.

Jesus in our reading for today is telling His disciples that there is danger coming for them and they need to remain awake. They are slaves in the house of the master, and soon the master will return. When he returns, you bet that he expects the house to be in order and his slaves to be waiting for him.

Last week in my sermon, I pointed out that many people spend too much time thinking about and worrying about judgement day. It is possible, however, to fall off the horse on the other side. It is also a mistake to forget about it completely. There are Christians today who struggle with this. All ideas of the new creation are gone, the idea of Christ returning to judge the living and the dead has left their theology. They have simplified everything down to when you die you go to heaven or hell, and that’s it.

The biggest reason that some have fallen into this false belief is Biblical illiteracy. They don’t know what the Bible really says about these things. Movies, popular culture, influencers, and politicians inform their understanding of Christianity far more than the actual Bible.

The problem with many people who call themselves Christians today is that they have all but fallen asleep. Their faith is at best stagnant and at worst is shriveling up. For the first time in American history, more people do not attend a church than attend. They have come to the belief that going to church isn’t a necessary part of being a Christian. I’m not sure if it is a part our American individualism or something else, but they have been lulled into thinking that their faith is only about them and Jesus.

They have done exactly what Satan wants them to do; they have isolated themselves from the body of Christ. That is what the church is, it is the body of Christ. To cut yourself off from the church is to cut yourself off from Christ. Yes, we confess that it is faith alone that saves, but faith must be nourished. Faith must be tended to and defended or else our sinful nature will overcome it and throw it away. Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the preached Word of God, and Christians caring for each other are things that Christ has given to His church, and it is only in His church that you will find them.

Many have fallen asleep at the wheel. Many have taken for granted the gifts that the church gives. Many have taken for granted the danger that is all around them. The devil is a roaring lion, and he is walking around the edges of the church waiting for a sheep to wander away alone.

There is nothing like danger to make you stay awake, to make you stay focused. In the face of danger, the human body is flooded with adrenalin and it often goes into fight or flight. The world is a dangerous place; sin, death, and the devil are all around us, threatening us with hell itself.

Christ died to take away the sins of the world, but faith in Christ alone is what will save you from hell. Faith in Christ alone is what will save you when Christ returns. Faith in Christ and in His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins is the only thing that is going to bring you into eternal life when you are raised from the dead one day.

Faith is much more than just acknowledging a fact. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 7:21,“Not everyone who says to me,‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Faith is more than just believing a fact happened. It is not to enough to say or believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world. You must believe that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, including your own!

Each sin that you have committed had a cost. Every time you broke the Law of God, there was a debt to be paid. My sin nailed Jesus to the cross; your sin nailed Jesus to the cross. Sin is a big deal; it is not something to be treated lightly, it is still a very dangerous thing.

Faith is not just acknowledging that Jesus died for the sins of the world. Faith is trusting that although you are sinful, although you have broken the Law of God, your sins are forgiven. Your debt is paid.

Dear Christians, I urge you to stay awake, to stay vigilant. The devil is real, and he wants you to lose your faith. He wants you to stop reading the Bible. He wants you to wander away from the church. He wants you to make light of your sin.

The devil is real, and he wants you to do those things, but he cannot make you. He can lie and trick and deceive, but he cannot force you, and you are far from helpless against him. In your baptisms, you have been given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has given you faith. Your faith grants you salvation, and it gives you power to resist the devil. It gives you power to overcome your sinful desires. You cannot escape sin completely, but you can get better. You can turn away from many sins.

You have been given the Bible, which is God’s Word for you. It shows you your sin, and it shows you how God has taken it away. You have also been given the Holy Christian church and the many gifts that come with it. You have brothers and sisters in Christ who love and care about you. That too is a protection from the devil. The church has been given the gift of the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion. There you receive yet again the forgiveness of your sins. There you receive the body and blood of the Savior who set you free. You receive a taste of the sacrifice that has changed the world.

So, dear Christians, stay awake. Do not sleep; the danger is real, the car is moving. One day, Christ will return; He is at the very door. We are living today in the end times, but we are not yet at the end. There is still time for many to wake up. There is still time for those who have wandered to return. I’m sure that you all know at least one person who has fallen asleep. Talk to them, invite them to church, pray for them, do your best to wake them up because the night is almost over, and soon the sun will rise.

Soon, Christ will return. On that day, you and I and all those who have stayed awake will finally find our rest. On that day, the Lord of the Sabbath rest will return, and we will find true rest in Him. But on that day, not all will find rest. As Christ says, on that day there will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth, so stay awake until that day comes that you may rise to new life and not death.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.