

“Choosing the Good We’ll Do” A Meditation offered by Dale Osborne
June 8, 2008 Psalm 42: 1-4; Hebrews 13: 1-2,5-6, 16 and Mark 14: 32-38

Our Gospel lesson for today takes place at a time when Jesus may have been tired, hungry and fearful. A lot had happened to him and his friends after they entered Jerusalem for the last time together. The world around them was tossing and turning with insecurity and religious unrest. People were starving for a little sanity in their lives and a little more love in their hearts. Jesus gathered his friends in a quiet place for centering and prayer. That is where the lesson begins.

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

When I read about these three disciples, close friends and followers of Jesus, falling asleep when he longed for them to pray near his side, I am reminded of the times in my life when I have slept while work or compassion should have been my choice. How could Peter, James and John fall asleep during this hour of painful desperation for Jesus? Then I remembered, we often fall asleep when we are weary and tired. Even when the need is great for action and commitment, our bodies need rest. Even when our dearest friend is struggling for his very life, our bodies drift off to sleep when exhaustion overcomes us. Some people even fall asleep because they are overcome with anxiety or a feeling of helplessness. Their body just shuts down in an effort to defend itself from the gathering gloom.

Jesus is apparently frustrated by the snoozing of Peter, James and John. He is frustrated but not truly irritated or angry. When he says to them, “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”, he is pointing out that while they have succumbed to the shortcomings of the body by falling asleep, they do have in their hearts the desire, the spirit to do what needs to be done. This is a lesson for all of us today. It is a lesson about Jesus’ desire to give us a chance over and over again to be present with him as long as our spirit is willing. Now what does that mean for you and me today? How can we be present with Jesus today? Is there some time machine in the chapel that can whisk us back 2000 years to an age when Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem? For better or for worse, we have no such literal time machine. We do however have opportunities to be present with Jesus and connect to his mission on earth.

Each year we receive in this church the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. This offering pulls together people in churches of 9 different denominations in an effort to support God’s children who

have been affected by natural disasters, disease, drought and famine. Besides our American Baptist churches, the offering is supported by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Church of the Brethren, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church and our friends at Church World Service, better known as the CROP Walk people. All of these churches set aside a time in June to emphasize our option to pray and live with Jesus by reaching out to the children he loves in our country and around the world.

Last year, people in more than 100 nations were assisted by the funds raised through One Great Hour of Sharing. Children in Zimbabwe who are affected severely by the AIDS epidemic are helped by this offering. This is another chance for us to wake up and be present with Jesus. Children in Burma who have been uprooted by the recent cyclone and its ensuing floods are helped by this offering. Burma is the first nation that American Baptists connected to in an effort to share the love of Jesus around the world. Burma is another chance for us to wake up and be present with Jesus. In May of 2007 a tornado hit a community in southwest Kansas and destroyed everything in its path including an American Baptist Church like ours called the First Baptist Church of Greensburg. Yet within a week the pastor of the church, Rev. Marvin George, received a One Great Hour of Sharing emergency grant to help meet the needs of his church family. People had a chance to wake from their slumber and be present with Jesus in that community just one year ago.

Earlier in the service, I had the great honor and privilege to hold up a child for dedication to God through this church. That is a very moving part of my ministry and of every church's life. We lift up a new child and remember Jesus' love for all of God's children. Whether we are parents or merely visitors in a home, when we hear the cries of a newborn, we are quickly awakened from our slumber to attend to his or her needs. Sometimes we fall asleep during our prayer time. We roll off into dreamland because our flesh is weak and we are tired from our labors. But know today that Jesus is calling all of us to chance after chance to wake from our slumbers and connect to him again and again. Do not be always stifled by sleep, rise up from your slumber when the voice of the child is calling to you. Rise up and choose the good you will do in God's world. Remember the pleas of Jesus in Mark's gospel and remember the words from Hebrews that speak to us today, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

The One Great Hour of Sharing envelopes are in your bulletin today. Please join as you are able by making a check out to Binkley and placing it in the envelope. Every penny raised will be used to respond to Jesus as he gives us opportunity to be present with him around our world. Thanks be to God.