

“Wake-up call”

August 19, 2007

Text: Jeremiah 23:23-32, Luke 12:49-56

I.

Are you awake? I don't mean *literally* awake; I mean *awake* to what's really going on in your life ... to the BIG PICTURE of your life.

A parishioner in one of my Californian churches used to say to me all the time: *Are you paying attention? Pay attention, now!*

Over the years, I've learned that he's right. Because all the time, life is swirling around us ... and so much of it is in the details. Are we paying attention, reading the fine print?

There's the humorous story about famed detective **Sherlock Holmes** and his faithful companion, **Dr. Watson**. On a camping trip one time, they were in their sleeping bags, looking at the sky above. And Holmes said, ***Watson, look up! What do you see?***

Watson answered, ***Well, I see thousands of stars.***

And what does that mean to you, Holmes inquired?

Well, said the pensive Watson, ***I guess it means we'll have another nice day tomorrow. What does it mean to you, Holmes?***

To me, said Holmes somberly, ***it means somebody has stolen our tent.***

II.

HELLO! *Wake-up call!* Are we awake? All the time, in life, we hear the comment: *Whoa, that was a wake-up call.*

It could be in a marriage that's drifted into an extended malaise ... where a spouse gets to the point where they're just *going through the motions*. They've lost some spark but they're hardly aware of it. And then something will happen that will jolt one or both spouses into a new awareness: *I need to pay attention to my marriage.*

Happens all the time.

Or it could be with our health. We think we're doing fine, moving along, and then—boom—we go to the doctor for a routine physical and discover one of our arteries is 80 % blocked ... or we have some pre-cancerous condition on our face.

Often times, a sudden *heart condition* is a wake-up call to pay more attention to our health—to diet and exercise. I can't tell you how many people I've known over the years who are sailing along, seemingly fine, and then—out of the blue—they're in the hospital for double or triple by-pass heart surgery ... always a *wake-up* call for life style change.

III.

We have *wake-up calls* with our faith too.

If we're not careful, easily, we can fall into a pattern of spiritual laziness where we take God for granted (never a good idea) ... and where we take our spiritual life for granted as well.

We get busy, spread too thin ... and, almost without noticing, we stop practicing the presence of God. We stop praying ... or our praying becomes boringly repetitious to the point where we're not really dialed in.

And then something happens; the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or a life-threatening illness. And suddenly our whole life becomes a *wake-up call* as we hustle to adapt and adjust and cope with the sudden change.

1. *Wake-up calls* are calls to see the BIG PICTURE of our lives and get ourselves right with God and with those whom we love.
2. *Wake-up calls* are calls to renewal. They're awakenings to the purposes of God—for us personally and for our loved ones as well.
3. The truth is, there are times when we all need to *wake up* and get with it—at home, at work, with our health, our financial life ... whatever it is; we've got stuff we need to sort out and get a handle on.

IV.

In our reading this morning from Luke 12, Jesus says some notably *out of the ordinary* things ... things we don't expect him to say. That's what makes our reading this morning a **wake-up call** passage.

Clearly, Luke is anticipating Jesus' cross and his suffering when Jesus says:

I came to bring fire to earth, and now I wish it were already kindled. I have a baptism with which to be baptized (referring to his cross), and what stress I am under until it is fulfilled.

Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

This catches us totally off guard. We don't conceive of Jesus talking like that—about *bringing down fire* and being a source of *division*. He's supposed to be the Prince of Peace. And then he goes on ...

From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

*Father against son ... and son against father ...
Mother against daughter ... and daughter against mother ...*

No doubt about it: Jesus is trying to get their attention, and there's tension in the air ...

They're living on the edge of critical times; on the edge of a gripping challenge when people—the disciples included—will have to make a decision.

Throughout Luke 12, there's a sense of urgency, which in the Bible always means a call to repentance, to a *turning* to God. Critical choices will have to be made about loyalties.

A central thrust of the message, therefore, is *pay attention*. And *see the BIG PICTURE*. In other words, *know who you are*. And, again, *know where your loyalties lie and the nature and the focus of your most basic commitments*.

For always, the temptations of the world linger; they're out there ... inviting our gushing attention, challenging our character and value commitments.

V.

Clearly, Jesus is frustrated that people aren't dialed in to the BIG PICTURE of the times. They're all caught up in day-to-day trivia and the routine of their lives.

To make his point, he notes how—very easily, and with considerable skill—they interpret the weather conditions:

*When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, **It's going to rain** ... and so it does. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, **There will be scorching heat** ... and again, so it is.*

Well how then, he goes on, (how) can you be so good at interpreting the weather, but you are so clueless about the signs of the times.

He wants to say to them: **can't you see what's happening**.

It's like he wants to grab hold of them and shake them. **Wake up! Wake up!** Look around you. *Really look. And listen!* .

VI.

The prophet **Jeremiah** expresses this same concern. (This is both before and immediately after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians (587 BCE), before and during the Exile (587-538 BCE).) False prophets have arisen in many situations, seeking to mislead the people. Talk of short-term successes and convenient distortions of the truth are deceiving the people.

Indeed, the whole of Jeremiah's prophecy is a *wake-up call* to Israel.

What Jeremiah calls for is a profound repentance, a turning away from Israel's historical tendency to *go her own way* and *do her own thing*.

Both Jeremiah and Jesus sound a chord that we need to hear in our own times. The message is, *you're not listening! Or, at least, you're not listening to the right voices.*

Beyond global warming ... beyond the war in Iraq ... beyond all the violence and greed and the lingering inequities that define our global community, what these scriptures are saying to us, friends, is that there are times when we need to see things about our lives that we're not seeing ... for whatever reason.

You know how to interpret the weather patterns, says Jesus, but you don't know how to interpret the present time.

There are situations that we need to grasp ... and where we need to arrive at some level of understanding—some level of discernment.

There are aspects of our relationships ... things we're not seeing ... things we're taking for granted. There are movements of the spirit that we need to begin to listen to—trends in our wider family, perhaps, or at work with our career; things that have changed but we haven't noticed.

VII.

A few years back, at a gala event known modestly as the **Superbowl Breakfast**, Chris Carter was speaking. A veritable *Who's Who of football celebrities* were in attendance.

Christ Carter was an All-American at Ohio State University and an all-pro wide receiver with the Minnesota Vikings. Anyway, as he was speaking, he started talking about faith ... catching many who were attending that morning off guard.

At every state of my life, he began, I've always been the best ... high school ... college ...the pros. But the turning point of my life was when I was cut by the Philadelphia Eagles.

When he mentioned that word, *cut*, his voice sort of cracked and he got real emotional ... and suddenly the breakfast ceased to be just a wonderful *Media event*. It became a *real-life* event because everyone there could relate to what Chris Carter was saying.

*For the first time in my life, he went on, I looked around and realized there was a team that didn't want me. And right then I had a **reality check** about my life. I had to flat-out admit that I wasn't good enough any more as a football player.*

*What was I going to do? My whole identity was suddenly just swept aside. And for the first time in my life, I discovered an emptiness that I didn't know existed. And for the first time in my life I said, **God, I need help.***

There was nothing magical ... no bright lights. But in a very calm and real way, God reached out to me.

God found me at my lowest point, at the end of my rope. God found me when I was spiritually bankrupt. God found me and restored my soul.

VIII.

Our over-arching BIG PICTURE message this morning, friends, is a call to *repentance* ... to a *turning*—a *turning away* from yesterday (with all its messiness; its lies, delusions and distortions; its shallowness) and a turning to God.

God knows. The Bible knows. It's the human situation. Now and then, our lives get out of sync. All about us, things are changing, and there are times when we don't see the change. It happens.

We grow older ... more set in our ways. Easily, we're tempted to live in a smaller world ... and we lose our grasp of the BIG PICTURE.

Do we need a **wake-up call** today? Do we need an angel of God to come down, light on our shoulder and help *turn* us to a new awareness of *who we are* and *what God's purposes are for our life*?

Do we as individuals, as a people, do we need a *wake-up call* to better grasp the *signs of the times* that everyday challenge our deepest commitments and loyalties?

Friends, let the Spirit come ... and let it lead us to a new *turning* ... that our powers of discernment and understanding may be forever exalted.

May God's holy name be praised! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com

