

“Be Awake to What God is Doing”

Romans 13: 8-14

Paul just doesn't let up, does he? Last week, he called us out because we were forgetting what it means to love our neighbors and now this week, he is showing us that we are forgetting the reason why we are people of faith in the first place. Paul just doesn't let up, does he?

As much as I would want to argue with Paul on this, I do have to say that I am glad he refocuses our attention a bit. As much as I hate to admit that maybe Paul is right, I am thankful that Paul brings our attention back to why we are people of faith in the first place. He does remind us that we did decide to claim God as our source of life for a reason and maybe it is time for us to remember just exactly what that reason was in the first place. That reason being that somehow some way God transformed our lives, that somehow, some way, we experienced the living grace filled presence of God and from that moment, our lives have never been the same. For some reason, that maybe only we know, we decided to be people of faith, people of God because somehow, someday, God broke into the darkness and filled our lives with light and we have not been the same ever since

that moment. Just think about that moment when we all encountered God's grace, encountered God's love for the first time.

For some of us, that moment happened years ago and for others of us, that moment only happened yesterday. But it is a moment that we will never forget.

It was a moment that woke us up, that shook us up, a moment that made us become aware of the presence of God in our midst. Do you remember that moment?

Now I will tell you the frustrating thing for me as a pastor is that we all tend to believe or think that that moment only happens once in our lives, that that moment when God woke us up to the presence of God in our midst only happens to us just once in our lives. And I'll be honest, the church has not done a very good job of changing that perception either. As the church, we only focus on a few of the moments in people's lives: birth, baptism, sickness and death. The church really doesn't invite us as people of faith to look for God in the times found in between those moments. And to make matters worse, the church expects us on our own to sustain the presence of God in between those moments, only helping us out if there is a crisis of faith along the way. Those are the only moments the Church seems really interested in conversation with us. But what about the in between moments? Surely, there are other moments with life and faith intersect on a daily basis. Why aren't we talking about those moments in our lives?

For us as people of faith, our relationship with God all started in that moment when we first became aware of the presence of God in our lives and unfortunately from that moment on, we have always expected to never experience that joy, that hope, that passion again. But Paul reminds us and tells us differently.

In our text today, Paul reminds us that God is constantly at work in our world, making the Kingdom of God available to all of God's people. We just have to be awake to what God is doing around us to realize this. We need to open our eyes to the many ways God is bringing life and light into our world and realize that we are closer than we have ever been to that day with the Kingdom of God will truly be a reality here on earth for all of God's creation.

Okay...even as I say this, I know that I need to confess that I find it hard to do this for the most part. I tend to get bogged down in the details. I tend to look at the glass half empty rather than half full. I tend to focus more on my to do list rather than what's going on around me. So let me just say, I am the first to understand how truly difficult it is to become awake to what God is doing in our midst.

And I will also tell you that in spite of the way I usually look at the world, this whole eye/sight issue has helped me to see my blinds spots even more if you will. For those who were not here last week, let's just say, my right eye was not pretty. It was red and puffy, irritated and the vision out of my right eye was

basically non-existent. Don't worry it wasn't pink eye like I thought. It was something completely different and completely harmless and if I had paid attention to the larger picture, my eye issue wouldn't have gotten so complicated.

Okay back to my story, all this past week, the vision out of my right eye has been fuzzy and hazy. It has been hard to see the details, let alone see the full picture.

Sure I could close my right eye and see things clearly or at least see half the picture clearly but that was not what I was used to. And I'll be honest, the fuzzy vision scared me a bit. All week, I have worried if the vision was ever going to get clear in my right eye? Had I done permanent damage that would never allow to see things clearly again? Would I ever be able to see my children's faces fully and complete again? Would I ever be able to see the world around fully and completely again? Would I ever be able to see the full picture again?

Let me just say, this week has given me a new appreciate for sight.

And yes I will also say, that believe me, I'm not missing the irony here. On the week, that Paul is telling us to pay attention to the world around us, to see what God is doing around us, on the week, that Paul is call us the bigger picture, is the one week that I simply cannot.

And maybe that is the point. Paul understands that as people of faith, as people of God, we are really walking around with limited vision, not expecting to encounter our God in the world around us. Paul understands that we aren't really seeing the many ways that God is at work in our world simply because we can't or won't see the bigger picture.

Maybe Paul realizes that as people of faith, we are only allowing the world to tell us what to focus our attention on rather than really focusing our attention on God's grace giving actions that happen each and every day and truly encounter God in life giving ways.

Let me explain: Each and every day we let the media tell us what should grab our attention. We let the media tell us what stories we should give our attention to as our "main news" source of the day. We let outside sources tell us what we should focus on that day. And usually, it is always the scariest and most shocking stories ever simply because those outside sources know that those types of stories will get the better ratings for them

Sure I know that news outlets do "heart-warming" stories but they are never the lead stories. Those "heart-warming" stories usually get pushed to the end of the broadcast and are always introduced with "On a lighter note".

But what if we as people of faith, as people of God were telling the news? What stories would we tell? What stories would we share?

Because here is something we tend to forget: Yes, I fully admit that there is evil and darkness in the world. I am not denying that. But I have gotten to where I don't want to turn the TV on simply because it all seems to be negative. If I just looked at the news, I would say there is no way the Kingdom of God is here on earth. There is no way God is still working in this world. There is no way love has a chance at winning.

But then I look out my window and I see the good that surrounds me. I see people of faith sharing their time with our community through ministries like the Clothing Closet and Community dinners. I see young boys running around in cub scout uniforms, realizing that there is a place for them, realizing that they are not seen as just boys whose families are poor but rather boys who have potential to do wonderful and great things. I look out my window and I see people of faith sharing their God-given gifts with the world and I have hope. I know that Love will win in the end. And more importantly I know that the Kingdom of God is right here in our midst.

I look out my window and realize that all those scary and shocking stories are just a small part of what goes on in our world. I realize that there is so much more. That there is just so much more good happening around us than we will ever know.

We just have to be awake and aware of what God is already doing in our midst. We just have to be ready to tell our stories of God's grace, of God's love, of God's peace just as loudly so that all will know that there is good news still happening in our world.

What stories would we share? What stories would we tell?

Each and every one of us has a story to share, has a story to tell, that reminds us constantly God is at work in our world, that reminds us that we constantly encounter the presence of God, that reminds that Love will always win.

What stories would we share? What stories would we tell?

There is so much more good happening in our world than what the media would have us believe. God is making the Kingdom of God a reality here on earth for all of God's people. We just need to be awake to the many ways that God is doing this and calling us to share in this work.

Because in spite of what the media would have us believe, we are closer than we have ever been to the Kingdom of God becoming a reality for all of God's creation simply because we are one day closer to that time when Jesus promised to return.

And with each passing day, we are closer than the day before.

God is still at work in our world. And all we have to do is open our eyes and see that there is so much more good happening than we could have ever imagined.

All we have to do is be awake and aware of the many ways we encounter the presence of God in our lives.

Because who knows, today just may be the day that the Kingdom of God becomes a reality and we definitely wouldn't want to miss out on that!

So from now on, let us always believe that there is good in the world and may we always be ready to see it happening in the world around us each and every day.

Amen.