

**Sermon: Easter Awakening**  
**Scripture: John 20:1-18**  
**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**  
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If Easter is about anything, I'd say that Easter is about awakening. The awakening of Jesus from the dead, the awakening of Mary and the disciples from a stuck place of grief to a place of wonder and joy, the awakening of the earth from a long winter, the awakening of a new day from the darkness of night, but maybe more than all of that Easter is about the awakening of our own true selves to the beauty and abundance of the present moment from our sleep-walking state that had been previously unconscious and unaware.

The passion of Christ and his resurrection is this seemingly ancient external and esoteric sounding story that on second glance can be an amazingly immediate and personal story about each and every one of us. To proclaim "Christ is risen" and to respond "Christ is risen indeed!" is not to speak of something that has happened to some one man a long time ago but rather to proclaim something that is happening or at the very least could happen within our very selves! It's more like saying "I am awake" and responding "I am awake indeed!" What a wonderful thing to say to one another on this glorious Easter morning – I am awake! I am awake indeed! Even if it's not so true.

I don't mean that most of us are still groggy and grainy-eyed, I mean that most of us are not awakened and aware but sleep-walking through much of our lives. What gall I have to say such a thing! But I think it's probably true for all of us in here except for those enlightened few who might be in our midst but probably aren't. Isn't that friendly of me to greet you on this beautiful Easter morning by telling you that you sleep-walk through most of your life. But as I see it, I think it would be inappropriate to say that to you if I was myself fully awakened but I am a fellow sleep-walker myself so I feel like I know something on the subject. If I'm wrong and there are some truly awakened folks in our midst then I don't have to worry anyway because they won't be bothered in the least by my suggesting that they aren't.

Cause that's one of the central indicators of being awake – that you are not moved by the judgments and opinions and shenanigans of the people and circumstances around you. Conversely then a sure sign of being asleep is that we are reactive to the judgments, impression and opinions of the people around us. The Gospel is basically the story of one particularly awake person, Jesus Christ, surrounded by sleepwalkers and it all culminates not just in Easter but in Palm Sunday-Good Friday and Easter. On Palm Sunday everyone loves Jesus and is celebrating him because he is the Messiah and they are going to get what they want from him and when they realize he's a different kind of Messiah than what they thought and they can't get what they want from him they turn on him and crucify him. All along though Jesus is not swayed by the fickle crowd, neither does he rejoice in the crowd's adoration of him nor return anger and vengeance for the crowd's hatred of him. He's awake. And in fact he is so awake, so utterly awakened, that death Himself cannot have his way with Jesus but he rises and that's what we call Easter. That's the story in a nut-shell.

But go back with me a minute and think about it, because the story is even more specific about what keeps us asleep and what's key in the path towards awakening.

First of all Jesus was misunderstood. His purpose and plan, and in fact his whole life, was thoroughly misunderstood by most everyone and especially by his closest of friends. How much of our time and energy do we spend in our lives trying to make sure we are understood? I don't know about you but when I am misunderstood I am not a happy camper and do everything I can to be understood. In fact a lot of what do and don't do I'd say, if I were to be honest, is about

ensuring that I am understood. And that effort, to make sure we are understood by the people around us instead of just being comfortable with who we are is the behavior of a sleep-walker. Jesus was misunderstood and continues to be thoroughly misunderstood I imagine but it didn't alter his course or purpose right up to death.

Secondly, Jesus was betrayed and abandoned by his closest of friends. Again, what a nightmare! Could you imagine – or, maybe you've experienced - the betrayal of family members or friends and the death that accompanies that, the death of trust and hope in the future, the death of a sense of order and morality in the world. And how much of what we do or don't do, how much focus do we put upon trying to avoid or make sure such betrayals and abandonments don't happen. Often the abandoned and betrayed child spends his or her whole life keeping people at an arm's length so as not to suffer that pain again but then sacrifices life itself for that and drifts sleepily through avoiding pain but not knowing love either. Jesus is betrayed and abandoned but doesn't shut down his heart as a result and so stays awake.

Thirdly, Jesus experienced failure in a big way. We'd be hard-pressed to call the story of the passion of Jesus a success story. I think we try to call it a success but that's just because the dread of failure looms too large in our psyches that we'd rather spin the story as being one of great success and victory. So I don't know about you, but I really want to be a success. I want to succeed and I want to succeed very very badly. So much so in fact that I would even go so far as to say that much of what I do in my life is about NOT failing but rather succeeding. Seems natural enough to want that, but when that becomes the prime motivating factor in life over things like love and truth then we are living the life of a sleepwalker. Jesus lived with love and truth as front and center to everything he did in his life and even when the way of love made him look like a failure, he continued to opt for love. That's living an awakened life.

And then the final terrible thing, and with this I'll stop with this rather dark list of terrible things before I ruin your Easter Sunday and I'll get to the happy part, but Jesus was also utterly humiliated, mocked and scorned even before he was executed and even this did not turn him from his true course. The sleepwalker is one who does everything in his power to avoid humiliation and if it means being less than truthful or loving or compassionate then so be it, "as long as I am not humiliated".

You see what I am saying? Before his big death, Jesus died also to all these other ways that the human being tends to be diminished and put to sleep which is by way of being pulled and yanked and determined by the whims of the crowd, of the people surrounding us, instead of being determined and led by the only one who really knows us and knows what we need and what the world needs through us which is our Creator, God, Love, Great Spirit, whatever you might want to call Him or Her.

And that's who Jesus remains true to despite being misunderstood and humiliated and failing abandoned. He remains true to Love and yes he's crucified for it, which seems like not a great sales pitch for remaining true to love above all else but that's why the story doesn't end on Good Friday, but rather Easter Sunday.

Jesus arises from the dead, awakens with a glorified body full of light and love, not so much to point to some future reality of heaven that people can either win or lose, I'd say, but rather Jesus is resurrected to reveal the fullness and glory that can be known in THIS life if and when we finally die to all those fears that keep us tied up and bound in knots and distant from our true selves and sound asleep even as we move through our waking lives – when we finally let go of all of that we will have empty enough and open enough hands to let go into the abundance and graciousness, the amazing grace, that is at the heart of life as it was created by a loving God even on the first day of creation to this very moment and towards that end of which God only knows. Christ is risen... Christ is risen indeed! I am awake... I am awake indeed!