

## “Impatient”

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Now God is calling us to “wake up,” and I’m not just talking to those of you who are falling asleep during my sermon every week. [Laughter.] I’m asking in the name of Jesus Christ, to “wake up” to what is happening in the world around you: To be faithful and listen to the Holy Spirit to guide you beyond all of the distractions, all of the misinformation, and truly find what God is leading you to do - and what God is calling us to do individually and as a people of faith - because we have huge tasks before us.

This idea of being awakened is not unusual. It comes throughout the Bible and in theology, not only from 1 Thessalonians, but also in the Gospels. Matthew 24:42 says, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming.”

It was the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Karl Barth, who probably changed the Protestant Churches as much as anyone in this century, who said, “The first thing we have to say is that Christians are those who wake up.”

If we have any other command, according to Barth, it is that we wake up and move in this world, and make a difference. Barth argues that staying awake echoes the Apostles, who did not stay awake when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane - they missed what was happening. They didn’t hear the relationship of how God was talking to Jesus and preparing him to die on that cross. So, the Apostles suffered, because they didn’t understand why Jesus was dying so that he could live again. They slept through it. They missed it - and they needed to be awake.

Another one of my favorite 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians is Jürgen Moltmann, from Tübingen University. He declares that the coming of God should make believers *impatient* with the way the world is today. Moltmann says, “We are not impatient enough. We shouldn’t sit still while this world around us crumbles with unethical behavior; that this world is struggling because it doesn’t know or care about anyone but themselves.”

And, Moltmann says, “It is our *obligation* as Christian believers - as long as we have breath in this life - to be responsible, not just for ourselves, but for everyone else around us.” That is why we find and make special opportunities for our children. That is why we educate and care for issues and situations like Family Promise, so that no one gets left behind. We need that more today, than perhaps we ever have before.

I just started reading a book entitled “Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History.” I just started it, but it was written by a man named Kurt Anderson. There are parts of this book that I like a lot, and there are some parts that I just don’t like, because Kurt Anderson is an atheist. But, it helps me, as I’m reading this book on Fantasyland, to see how non-believers view Christians. I think, in many ways, he has it right when he talks about extremism in anything - whether it is extremism in religion, or extremism in a political party, or extremism toward any one view, without listening to the views of others.

He starts off the book by quoting Stephen Colbert, on “The Colbert Report.” [Laughter.] (You want to spend an hour talking about Stephen Colbert? You just talk to Ken Arentson. [Laughter.] That man! I miss meeting him every day. He would sit down with me and give me the daily update on the Colbert Report - every morning. I only get it once a week now, on Thursday. So, one of Stephen Colbert’s characters riffed on this idea of “The Word,” so I just want to share this quick one:

*One of his little characters said, “Truthiness.” He said, “Now, I’m sure some of you who are “word police” or the “wordi-nistas,” over at Webster’s are going to say, “hey,” that’s not a word. Well, anybody who knows me, knows that I’m not a fan of dictionaries or reference books: they are elitist. Consequently, constantly telling us what is and isn’t true, or what did or did not happen. Whose Britannica is to tell me that the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? What if I said it happened in 1941? That’s my right. It’s all about rights. If I want to say it happened in 1941, then it happened. It’s my right to say so. I don’t trust books, because they are all facts. No heart. Face it folks, we are in a divided nation; divided between those who think with their head, and those who know with their hearts, because that is where truth comes from, ladies and gentlemen. It comes from your gut.*

I just love the way Stephen Colbert does it. I can’t do it like he does it, but what he was getting at is that we have lost truth. Now what anyone feels is what they believe, and what they believe is truth. But what happened to *real* truth?

When I was growing up there were facts and you could trust them; now all of a sudden there are alternative facts. So, what do you believe anymore? What do we teach our children when everything is open to controversy? If I say one thing and Jen says another, well, neither of us can be wrong, even if we are saying the exact opposite thing, because it is what she feels in her gut - and I’m right, because I believe it in my gut. There is no truth in this world anymore. And what is that getting us, if there is nothing left to teach? And so, Anderson continues, the American experience - the original embodiment of the great enlightenment idea of intellectual freedom - every individual free to believe anything he or she wishes, has metastasized out of control. We have gotten to that point that every truth - no matter how ridiculous, if believed by someone - is acceptable.

So, it has left us in a mess. He said, let’s just look at one thing: our financial industry. The financial industry has fantasized that risky debt is no longer risky; that so many - tens of millions of Americans - fantasize that they could live like rich people. And now they don’t have anything to retire on. They are three paychecks from the street, and they are finding out the hard way that they are not rich. No matter how many times they tell themselves that they *are* rich, no matter how often they tell themselves that they know the truth – that they are rich - they are not. We have lived like rich people, and it is a lie when we are up to here [Scott holds his hand out, shoulder-high] in debt. Credit cards are not bank statements, and it has killed us. That is why we are leaving these little ones [pointing to children in the front row] with a struggle when we have deficits in the trillions of dollars, and America’s mutated fantasyland is much worse than even that. I will give you an example: now when I say one third of Americans, don’t brush that off. That means every third person, one-third of you would have to stand up for every one of these things I’m saying.

Of course, that doesn’t work because in this congregation we are all right. It’s those evil people outside. [Laughter.] So, it’s even more than one-third when you don’t count us.

One-third believe that the earliest ancestors were human beings just like us and there was no evolution. One-third of Americans believe that the government is in league with the pharmaceutical industry, and has hidden evidence of natural cancer cures - one-third of Americans believe that. One-third of Americans believe that extra-terrestrials have recently visited and now reside on earth: one-third.

One-quarter of people in this country believe that our previous president was and still is the antichrist. Good Lord! A quarter of this country believes that witches are real and have magical powers, and they are voting just like the rest of us. One in five - every fifth person - would stand up, and believe that our government has mind-controlling technology through television broadcasts signals, and the US officials were complicit in the 911 attacks: one in every five.

I have always said, you should have to take a test to vote and have children. [Laughter.] This should prove it. It has gotten so bad that a senior physician, at one of America's most prestigious university hospitals, is now on TV every morning, peddling miracle cures on his daily TV show. Thank you, Dr. Oz.

Major cable channels air documentaries treating mermaids, monsters, ghost and angels as if they are real. A CNN anchor speculated - on air - that the disappearance of a Malaysian airliner was a supernatural event.

Then, do you remember this one? Not even a year ago, a white woman felt black, pretended to be and, under those fantasy auspices, became an official with the NAACP and then - busted - said, "It's not a costume; not something that I would put on and take off anymore. I wouldn't say I'm African-American, but I would say I'm black." And she is not, but because she believes it, it's true - so everyone else is just expected to believe it.

We have gotten to the place where we can't share anything about anything, and this is what Moltmann, and what Karl Barth required of us: To say we need to be impatient about sharing the truth. It used to be that Jesus was the truth and the life, but now it's about truth on the simplest scale, that we can't even admit or share that anything is truth and fact. And that is scary for our world today. That is why it is time to wake up and live an impatient life of faith. God's life of compassion and humility can provide the lenses through which we view reality, and why is this a religious issue?

I remember when I was in seminary, and Jill and I met. It was my third church in seminary. But, we were in Florida, because if you are going to take an internship, why would you do it up north, where it is cold? I had a beach ministry where I learned to surf - very badly. [Laughter.] It was great.

I had one gentleman (we had some one come from one of the local agencies come and talk about caring for the poor) who raised his hand and said, "Oh, those poor people. They make so much on welfare that they all drive Cadillacs." He got applause. His fact automatically made it true that they must be making enough on welfare that they could afford \$600/month car payments on a Cadillac. Now that is not true; it is blatantly not true. But, they didn't take the time to register it in their brain that that makes no sense. When the woman explained how much they get, they didn't believe her, because they had seen people driving around in Cadillacs, and they were poor.

When facts are not facts in the church, we can't help, and we cannot provide aid. God's compassion requires us to look at life, to wake up, to take on the fantasyland, and to get back the truth of right and wrong.

You read articles now and you find out that children and youth video games seem more real to them than reality is, and we need to encourage them to wake up again. When Internet pornography replaces real relationships, it is time to wake up. When a certain brand of shoe makes you feel more virile, it is time to wake up. When the car you drive defines your self-worth, it is time to wake up.

This changes our idea of evangelism. Too many of us believe that evangelism was about saving somebody's soul. Anymore, it is helping people wake up enough to see the world around them: to see the reality, to see the poor in your midst, and do something about it. To see people in dire need and loneliness, and be there for them.

But, the fact-changers want to let you know that there is no one out there like that, and it is just not true. We have to find truth, because when we wake up, our relationships feel more authentic and meaningful. When we are awake, we are better spouses. When we are awake, we are better parents, because we know how to talk to our children; we know how to tell them right from wrong because when there are no facts, and everybody has their own, there is no right and wrong. If you feel like it, it must be right.

So what is left to tell our children? You know what we have left them to do? Just what it said in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. We leave them to walk, wandering around in the darkness, not knowing what's right or wrong. And shame on us for doing that. We have left them to wander aimlessly trying to find right, and stepping in all that wrong.

When dating a 14-year-old is acceptable in some places, we are living in a fantasyland. God is the creator of the ends of the earth. We need to wake up and be better children to our parents; to be better parents, to be better employees and employers - to be able to know right from wrong again.

God created reality. *We* have warped it into a fantasyland. God calls us back to reality. So, we are called to pray to God to help us see again: to wake up, to reach out.

We were talking before church started. A couple of us are mentors at Edmonds Elementary. We love going and seeing the children over there, every lunch hour, once a week. I have a little fourth-grade boy and Dan McPhail has a little-third grade boy, and we sit around and visit with them and get to know them, and we get to see the other kids there once a week.

They help my fantasyland go away, when I meet with those children. I become more concerned about them than I am myself. Their reality helps me overcome my fantasy. It doesn't matter to them whether I have the right brand of car, the right sweater label or the right neighborhood that I live in. They just care whether Dan and I show up each week.

They just care whether or not we ask about how their week went. And, I realized that it is not those fantasy things that make a difference, it all comes back to relationships. That is why Jesus died on that cross. That is why Jesus came and we celebrate it at Christmas, so

that God could have a relationship with us and show us the difference between fact and fantasy. And it is our job to be Christ-like - to show the rest of the world the difference between fact and fantasy, so that our children don't have to walk around in the dark anymore and they can see the way, the truth and the light.

We pray that we will be about that business this week and in the months and years to come.

Through the help of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

Amen