

Staying Awake – Lent 1 Staying Awake to Love  
March 9 2025  
Summerland United Church

*“When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them.  
“Stay Awake and pray.” (Luke 22: 45)*

*Jesus never stops asking you to stay awake. Stay awake to the suffering of the world, to our souls, to the amazing miracle of being alive. (T. Sit, 2021)*

**Threshold and Christ Candle:** Lent is a time to pay attention. It is historically a time of heightened spiritual practices in the lives of Christians.

Lent, the 40 days and nights before Easter are to remind us of Jesus time in the wilderness. Where he fasted and prayed, was tempted by the power and might of Empire, but refused it, choosing humility, compassion and mercy.

In the story of Jesus’ last night on earth, he went to the garden to pray. He asked his disciples to Stay Awake with him. But they couldn’t, they fell asleep again and again. The tribulations of the world around them were just too exhausting.

For our 40 days and nights we will practice staying awake. We will stay awake to the spiritual, to contemplation, prayer, study and awe. We will use a book, written by Tyler Sit, a pastor and theologian in Minneapolis. Using ideas and suggestions from this book we will practice Staying Awake to God, to our world of oppression and need for liberation and we will practice rest and rejuvenation of our spirit – so we can engage the world with courage, strength and love.

**Scripture:** Acts 2:42-47

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, metaphor, myth or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day God added to their number those who were being liberated.

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

### **Reflection**

This story in Acts, shares what the very first Christian Churches we're like. They sat together, learned together, ate together with glad and generous hearts. Not unlike our own congregation here, huh? We gather for worship gladly and we also engage our ministry through hospitality. This is clearly seen at our fellowship time after service, Monday Suppers, this past week at our Shrove Tuesday Pancake supper – thank you finance committee and the other volunteers for all your hard work!

We don't need a lesson in how to be together in community, we already do that very well.

What I want to talk about today a little bit is the very last word in the passage – today we read it as Liberated. More often than not, the Greek Word *soteria*, can be translated as Liberated and as Saved. We more commonly read this word translated as *Saved*.

The use of the word saved in Christianity has come to mean a promise for the afterlife, which wasn't the intention of the early Christians or Christ's message. Rather the intention was to focus on creating The Kingdom of Heaven – on earth, during this life – saved in this life for this life.

So, I use the word Liberated, because it doesn't carry the same baggage as the word Saved. Last week I talked about a post that's been going around the internet speaking about the difference between saying, "Jesus died for my sins" and "Jesus died standing up to evil". A member commented to me this week that the first was passive, required no action. Whereas the second encouraged action and a call to justice. The same can be said, I think about the words Saved and Liberated. If we believe ourselves to be saved: we're good, we have an assurance of a safe afterlife, so why rock the boat?

However if we consider liberation, that's a much more active word and concept. Liberation takes action on our part and requires us to not just engage in our own personal liberation, but work towards the liberation and lifting up of others.

In Chapter 1 of Tyler Sits book, he talks about how at his church Worship is "Love Training". Worship trains your heart to love the God who is beyond, who is right in front of you yet unimaginably greater, who is deeply healing and almost disturbing at the same time. (p6) He says that gathering in worship enlarged his heart so he could carry a little more love into the world. (p7) When faced with shouts of homophobic slurs at him, he was able to take the resentment he felt towards those people and during worship transform those feelings into a compassionate urgency to change the world.

He calls worship – a communal bread kneading of the soul – an opportunity immerse ourselves into something transformative, though real and embodied experiences. Gathering in worship gives us a refuge from a world that operates under the logic and

selfish drive of empire that thrives on oppression and fear. When we are intentional about worship –we become partners with God, in transforming the world.

We're in the season of Lent, which is about practicing intention. Traditionally Lent would be a time of Fasting so we can relate in a tiny way to Jesus' 40 days and nights in the wilderness where he prayed and fasted. At the Shrove Tuesday dinner, I talked with some folks about the eating up of all the fats in the house – because traditionally, you wouldn't eat fat again until Easter. A traditional Christian fast would mean eating only vegetables, whole grains and perhaps beans during this time.

However, this week I was reminded of a passage in Isaiah regarding fasting, which says this:

<sup>6</sup> “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Gathering together in fellowship and sharing we grow in love with glad and generous hearts. With this collective strength, with the love of God, the will of Jesus and the courage of the holy spirit we can step out into our week with a compassionate urgency to liberate the world.

Worship nourishes us spiritually so we can fast in this way. We don't have to give up coffee or Chocolate this lent as many commonly do. Rather we can fast from mindless consumerism, and empty choices. We can make intentional choices when we buy our coffee and chocolate and other food and items.

Worship nourishes us spiritually so we can fast from all that the world, that Empire, is demanding we swallow.

May it be so.