

Simon says touch your shoulder. Simon says grab a hymnal. Put it back. Close your eyes. Scratch your head. Cough. Cough again... Ssssssay hello. Do the hokey pokey. Simon says sit back and listen.

I can tell by your bated breath that you were waiting, waiting for the next Simon Says. You were excited and anticipating what on earth might be coming next, weren't you?

Last week we were told that we must endure suffering, assured that just as those around the temple were to wait patiently through the suffering they would experience prior to the destruction of the temple, we too must endure the false Christs spurting lies and the world causing terror and Christians around the globe undergoing persecution for their proclamation of the Gospel. Last week we were prepared for a long haul of one trial after another and we were told not to jump the gun. Don't act too quickly, don't presume that Christ has returned just because some war seems to be the worst one yet or because some guy with a beard says he's Christ returned. Don't get too excited; just endure. This was last week.

This week we are told almost the opposite; sure we are to still endure suffering but we are to be ready for the end, ready for whatever might be coming next. Though the time before the end will be long, when the end happens it will be quick; it will be obvious, and it might just be over before you know it, so don't miss it.

It's kind of like an elastic band. If you and I were to stretch it out, eventually we're going to think "it's going to snap any second now" but if it's any good, it's going to keep going. And going. And going. It might then look like it's going to stretch forever, but don't be lulled into a false sense of security. It will snap, and when it does, you won't have any time to react. Hopefully you were wearing gloves because there's no time to pull your hand out of the way let alone put on some protection. Now, this analogy only works for so long, because you and I know

what an elastic band typically feels like as it stretches out before it breaks; we might even see the colour change as it pulls apart. But we don't know how turbulent the world can get before Christ returns. So even though we watch and we endure, we have nothing to gauge when things are just bad enough that He'll return. So all we can do is be ready every day.

Jesus says, be on guard, be awake. We are to be like the doorkeeper, with our eyes staring out the window for the first sign of His silhouette breaking through on the horizon. Jesus was kind enough, in using this parable, to say that He might return just when we least expect Him to—just as it was rare for one to return in the middle of the night. But in expecting Him when we least expect Him, we stop expecting Him when we *used to* expect Him, making that the new least expected time, and so could jump back and forth between when to expect him. The reality is, we are to expect Him at any moment of any day. At all times we are to be awake.

Now this staying awake endurance is hard. It's an entirely different challenge than enduring persecution that we talked about in last week's Gospel. When you're on your toes and ready for turmoil and even in the midst of a fight, the adrenaline is pumping and you can be alert and awake for anything. Enduring persecution might be scary and it might even cost you your life, but I find that simply living everyday life can lull us to sleep sometimes.

And of course, staying awake doesn't mean you should sell your bed and invest in a boatload of energy drinks and espresso. We are told to stay spiritually awake. Though this can be just as hard as keeping your eyes open for 96 hours.

And I think that staying awake can get especially difficult when we aren't even told what it means. Yes, we're to be awake for His return, but earlier in our text it says when He comes back the universe will essentially be collapsing—I think that'll wake even the deepest sleeper—

and the angels are going to come collect the elect. That's me isn't it? Can't they grab me, pjs and all, from my bed?

What we hear in these texts is that we must make sure that we're one of the elect when He returns. Weird statement. How can you make sure you're one of the chosen and be ready to be stolen away by the angels?

Well, He doesn't mean you must make sure you're in the right place at the right time, as if there's a secret angel landing strip where they come get the elect and only the chosen ones will know about it. It isn't about knowing any secret information like that.

Neither does it mean that you're the elect if you're packed for the trip, a backpack full of good works that make God's favour shine down on you.

No, there's no sure-fire thing you can do to know that you've managed to stay in the elect, no list of things that you can accomplish to ensure you're spot in heaven.

Rather, to be the elect is to know that you are the elect and to live like it. Not that you live by certain morals or have accomplished a checklist of at least okay things in your life. It means to be aware that you have been redeemed by Christ in His final work of salvation on the cross and to trust in Him. This means that knowing that you were baptized is how you know that you are the elect. It means that knowing Christ gave His life *for you* is to know that you are the elect. It is nothing that you have done or ever could do, but simply the fact that you have been gifted with faith and that it has been sustained in you means that you are the elect.

And so the call to remain vigilant, eyes wide open (even amidst a good night's rest) is to be aware of what Christ has done for you. With this in your mind, you can commit the day fully to God, asking for His grace that you might live the day to His glory and to your neighbour's good. With this you recognize that the Christ who came to die for you in the past and will come

again in the future for the judgment on the world and the gathering of His people, He has redeemed you and you live in Him this very day.

And then at the end of the day, or at the end of the morning, or at the end of a phone call even, you can reflect back, grateful for all the care He has graciously bestowed upon you and you may plead for forgiveness for where you have sinned, asking for that which He has won for you and promised to you, His elect, asking for that which causes you to be righteous now and when He returns.

This is how we are awake and ready for His return. But on our own, our eyes grow tired, our minds wander, and the fact that Christ hasn't returned yet makes it feel okay for this faith-in-Christ thing to be a little less dominant in our lives—if He hasn't returned today, it likely won't be tomorrow and so I'm just going to live my life without really trusting in Him.

In order to combat this natural doziness of us humans, us Christians, we must constantly be woken up. In the liturgy we are faced with our need. We cannot skirt around our guilt and our need for forgiveness because we are essentially forced to confess that we are sinners in our confession. And not just we, but me. I'm a sinner and if it were left to me, I'd have no chance, let alone hope. Talk about a wake-up call. And immediately as we're awoken to our despair we are met with His promise in the absolution, with His life, with His keep-you-going-strong energy drink of the Gospel. **And all throughout the liturgy, we are met with splashes of cold water to the face to wake us, and precious Gospel to comfort us; all this is done by His Word.**

He who has won for us our salvation has promised to sustain it—His Word endures forever He says, and this includes both His Law and also His Gospel. This means that His Word and proclamations that *you* are a sinner and that the price of *your* sin was paid for lives on forever, until the end of this age. This keeps you up as one of the elect, and then when He

returns, your sin will be done away with forever, removed from you as far as one end of the globe is from to the other.

Coming here to hear His unending, never dying word keeps us on our toes, always dying and rising in Christ. That which is taught and practiced here then becomes our pattern for the other six days. Here we are kept awake and kept close to the one who gives us life. And yet, you know it as well as I do, people fall asleep. Church becomes meaningless and they stop coming. So Jude gives to us a responsibility to keep our brothers and sisters up in the faith as well.

He begins by pleading and commanding them to build themselves up in the most holy faith and to pray in the Spirit; this is first and foremost an exhortation to meet together just as we have today. Here we are being built on Christ the cornerstone of our faith and in response we pray. We pray for ourselves and for our Church, for our brothers and sisters in Christ near and far, and even for the needs of those whom salvation has not yet taken a hold of yet. Here we keep ourselves in His mercy, receiving it time and time again so that we may be kept strong to wait. We wait patiently as He forms us and grows His Church, His Family, so that when He comes, His mercy may be shown to countless saints.

Jude tells us what being awake looks like, but then he also shows us what it looks like to doze off and just how important it is for us to wake up the others. It is too easy to just close your eyes of faith for a second and not even realize what is happening, so when you see someone who is slipping off, it is your responsibility to reach out.

When they are doubting, whether that be in the finality of salvation or in the role of God as creator or the unity of Christ's body or the reality of God's gifts given to us in His Word and Sacraments, whether they doubt something miniscule or huge, we must reach out to them with the grace of Christ, which alone is their salvation. They are allowed to struggle, to question, to

pace back and forth between answers. We are to have mercy on them, demonstrating the patience and grace that was shown to us.

And to those who are sinning, sinning repeatedly and seemingly unrepentant, we aren't to shun them; we aren't to count them as lost causes, but we're to reach out to them. We must always be careful that we don't get drawn into their sin, lulled by their justification and enticed by the life they are living, but despite these risks we reach out, with both God's love and His Law. You and I both must be willing to call a sin a sin, but we must do it in a way that is not for our own self-righteousness but for the sake of their salvation, for the sake of their righteousness in Christ. And when they turn from it—this doesn't mean stop sinning, for this one might be engrained in their lives for the time being—but when they repent, they remain awake, just as you and I.

For the doubting and sinning is not sleeping, for we all doubt this or that and we certainly all continue to sin for the rest of our days. But our eyes of faith are growing tired when our doubting conscience is not met by the assurance of Christ, when our sinning selves are not covered in the salve of His righteousness. So really, and truly, it is of the utmost importance that you find yourselves here, in the Church where we meet Christ for us, *Christ for you*. Here He wakes your soul to sing of the righteousness He has gifted you, to repent of and flee the sin which remains our lot in life and believe in the Life, capital L, that He has freely bestowed upon you.

Here, where we meet Christ, we are prepared for the stars to come crashing down from the heavens and the ground below to tremble. Here our eyes are refocused on Christ, so that on the day of His return, whenever that may be, our eyes will be looking for Him, who was, and is, and will always be our salvation. Here, you find and trust in and worship him who is able to keep

you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
and so to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion,
and authority, before all time^[b] and now and forever. Amen.