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Ships of Faith

*Set Sail
for
Portland*

WHO ARE
YOU?

WHY WE
FALL ASLEEP
IN CHURCH



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WHY we sleep in church

by Chris Surber

We Are Not Awake to the World

Life is difficult everywhere. Most American Christians drastically underestimate how much richer we are compared to the rest of the world. According to Gautem Nair, in an article published in the *Washington Post* last year, when polled, “The average U.S. resident estimated that the global median individual income is about \$20,000 a year. In fact, the real answer is about a tenth of that figure: roughly \$2,100 per year. Similarly, Americans typically place themselves in the top 37 percent of the world’s income distribution. However, the vast majority of U.S. residents rank comfortably in the top 10 percent.”

We don’t know what we don’t know. What’s worse, people tend to contextualize the world according to their personal experience of their little slice of it. If we want a faith that works, our faith can’t be a Christianity that slumbers in a world that suffers. Christianity is made for the stuff of real life. Our way does not live in the land of dreams.

It is like James Baldwin said a half century ago, the world suffers while we drink our Coca Cola in the suburbs. We rest. They groan. If we affirm Christ, we need to rest from resting long enough to educate ourselves about the real conditions of the world. “What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (James 2:14 NLT)

According to Worldhunger.org, for example, “As of 2013, when the most recent comprehensive data on global

poverty was collected, about 767 million people are living below the international poverty line of less than \$1.90 per person per day (The World Bank, 2016).” Hunger and poverty are just two of the conditions of the world God calls us to care about. We have a collective responsibility as the ambassadors of God’s grace, love, justice, and mercy in the world. As such, we have an obligation to educate ourselves as to the current conditions of the world, the needs in our land, and how our neighbors are actually living.

We Are Not Awake to the Mission

The Lord may take us overseas to the most impoverished parts of the world or He may draw us down the street, but He is calling us into the world to live awakened lives at the intersection of the world’s needs and the Christian’s call. So, what is our call?

We are called to share the compassion of Jesus with everyone everywhere. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love the least of these as though they are Christ Himself. (Matthew 22:39, Matthew 25:35-36) We are called to share the good news of the Gospel that delivers humanity from sin and reconciles us to God and one another. (Matthew 28:16-20) Whether it is sharing a conversation with an isolated elderly man at a retirement community in our neighborhood or bringing a cup of cold water to a little girl on a mountainside in Haiti, the mission is not complicated. However, it is as costly and inconvenient as it is a great joy. No more slumbering. Wake up to the mission.

I like the way Congregational pioneer missionary and physician, David Livingstone said it. “If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?” Wake up to the mission of God at work in the world through us. Engage in life on mission. Joyfully serve the Lord!

We Are Not Awake to Our Mandate

We have been tamed. We are incalculably more capable for life on mission than our actions imply. Here is a Haitian proverb that speaks well to the common condition of our courage. “Si bèf te konn fòs yo, majoral pa ta lanse yo.” If cows knew their strength, they couldn’t be butchered. We are dangerously domesticated. Our calling is for drafty rickety missionary planes, not the extravagance of pillow padded pews.

Have you ever considered going on an international mission trip? Is God nudging you to get more involved in missions? Consider coming to Haiti with a thriving ministry where the Gospel and Compassion of Jesus are put on display in loving, relationship driven, God honoring ways! Visit us online at www.supplyandmultiply.com to learn more. Email us at contact@supplyandmultiply.com.

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Our mission is the world! Our mandate includes the promise that the King who sends us goes along with us as well. “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b) If the King of Kings has commissioned us for a life of service to others why so much serving ourselves?

My early pastoral mentor, Bill, used

to say, “I read the back of the book... we win!” Brothers and sisters, we may take the occasional nap in church, but by the grace of God, may we never be content with a slumbering faith in the world! Wake up to the world. Wake up to the mission. Wake up to the real power we have through faith in our risen Lord!



Pastor Chris Surber having a sweet stare down with a little friend in Montrouis, Haiti in September 2019.

Snooring, snoozing, sleepy, and sleeping parishioners abound! Why is that? At Mt. Hope Congregational Church, they say it would take real commitment for someone to sleep through my military-trained loud voice! But the truth is that regardless of the eloquence, passion, thundering voice, or struggling, monotone timidity of the preacher, there is too much snoring in the pews. Worse yet, and what this writer is really much more concerned about – there are too many sleep walking Christians on the streets of daily life.

Sleepy Christians in the pews is careless discipleship. It happens. Sometimes there are even very understandable reasons. Slumbering Christianity on the streets is abandon to our divine purpose and call in the world. We must war against it.

Here are three reasons we sleepwalk and a few alarm clock thoughts.

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