

*Living God, guide the hearing, the singing the speaking, and the living-out of your Word.
Amen.*

A few days ago, I was visiting with my sister and niece. My 3-year-old nephew was home too, but he was taking a nap. As the visit drew to an end, one of us needed to go and wake him up. My sister had to be somewhere, and she needed the kids to come along with her.

I quietly entered my nephew's dark bedroom. I said his name, and gently tried to wake him up. He rolled over and sort of grumbled, but seemed to still be asleep. I told him who I was, and asked him to give me five – we have a special way of doing that, and it usually makes him laugh.

He halfheartedly moved his hand toward me, but was still mostly asleep. Eventually my nephew woke up enough to reach up so I could pick him up and carry him downstairs. Once we got downstairs, he fell back asleep on my shoulder. Which is sweet and adorable! But not the best when there's a schedule to keep.

When he finally woke up, my nephew complained about still being tired. Before long, of course, he was back to his usual cheerful self. But there was some significant toddler grumpiness before that happened.

It was a *slow* awakening.

A friend of mine is a CPR survivor. A few years ago, he had a heart attack and was revived. Until that moment, he hadn't even known that he had serious heart issues.

A week later, to address those issues, he went in for bypass surgery.

By this time, he had been able to process his experience a little bit, and he had the strong support of his wife in getting healthier – including going in for surgery. But when you have literally just died and been brought back to life, your perspective changes a bit. Before going under anesthesia, my friend told his wife how much he loved her, and they each spoke all those important things that couldn't be left unsaid. They were fully aware of the fact that this surgery would require that his heart again be stopped and restarted, and they didn't want to have any regrets if something went awry.

Fortunately, nothing went awry. The surgery was successful.

And while he was still waking up from the anesthesia, my friend realized that things were going to be ok. His wife was in the room with him, he was intubated so couldn't talk, and he was still groggy from the meds... but from some depth of memory he pulled up the sign language he had learned ages before, and signed to his wife, "I love you."

It was a *profound* awakening.

What kind of awakening do you think Jesus had when he was raised from the dead?

Was he immediately grateful for God's power and new life?

Did he sit in the tomb for a while, wondering if it had all been a bad dream?

Would he have been excited or confused?

Did Jesus, perhaps, experience the same kind of fear and great joy that the women were about to know?

All of the Easter stories recorded in Scripture share the story from the point of view of the women who discover the empty tomb. No one describes the resurrection from Jesus' point of view.

Even in the Gospel of John, which describes Jesus' thoughts and motivations throughout his ministry, doesn't take a stab at what it was like for Jesus on that first Easter morning.

In today's Gospel account of the Resurrection, we hear that the two Marys were approaching the tomb when an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away, the guards became stunned, and Jesus disappeared from the tomb.

What was Jesus doing? Why wasn't he there to greet the women?

Is it possible that he needed to take a minute to collect himself before figuring out what to do with the new life he had been given?

What did it feel like for him to be woken, not from sleep, but from death?

We can't know the answer to these questions.

But it is interesting to wonder. Might Jesus have been grumpy when he first was raised from the dead? Still tired, groggy as though from anesthesia? In pain from his wounds, or sore from lying in a tomb for a few days?

All we can compare Jesus' experience to is our own experience.

What is it like when *we* have an awakening?

I don't just mean what happens when our alarm clock goes off in the morning.

Some of us hit snooze seven times, and some of us jump joyfully out of bed before the alarm even goes off! One isn't better than the other when we're talking about our daily routines – you do what works for you.

But on a deeper level, what happens when we are woken up to the issues and needs around us?

Our child comes out of the closet and we realize that we do, in fact, support rights for the gay community.

We make friends with a refugee, and we realize that we actually do want to spend our resources to protect people who are threatened around the world.

Our classmate discloses their chronic health condition, or a coworker mentions a mental health diagnosis, and we suddenly understand the importance of accessible health care coverage for all kinds of people.

The women experienced fear and great joy at the empty tomb.

Isn't that our experience, too?

When we realize that something has happened in our world, and we need to respond, we are excited about it, but kind of scared about what it will mean.

When we are in tune with the power structures that direct society, and we figure out our place in that structure, it can be a powerful moment of awakening.

There's a term for this reaction, which has become increasingly popular in recent months.

If someone is in tune with the world's needs and they decide to take a stand on an issue, you might say that they are "woke."

One article that describes this use of the word says, "The phenomenon of being woke is a cultural push to challenge problematic norms, systemic injustices and the overall status quo through complete awareness. Being woke refers to a person being aware of the theoretical ins and outs of the world they inhabit. The phrase itself is an encouragement for people to wake up and question dogmatic social norms."

It's more than just waking up from a nap or letting the anesthesia wear off, or even being raised to new life. Being woke implies that you're getting up off your tush and doing something about your new level of awareness.

The article goes on to say, "Those who are woke must engage themselves in ways that actively challenge the world we live in. We must create safe spaces for same-gender-loving communities; we must be open to learning about the transgender experience, acknowledge race and gender discrepancies, victim blaming and all the other messed up ish."

<https://blavity.com/amp/what-does-it-mean-to-be-woke>

"Get woke" could be used as a summary for all of Jesus' ministry. Notice the oppressed and marginalized person around you, and figure out how to support them. From healing a woman with very severe feminine health issues, to kicking moneychangers out of the Temple where they were exploiting the worshippers, Jesus called attention to injustices in his world, and actively worked to bring righteousness rather than oppression.

Jesus was attentive to the power structures that upheld the status quo, and he actively worked to challenge them. This is what got him crucified.

But thankfully, Jesus didn't stay in the tomb.

The Easter good news is that God said a resounding *NO* to the powers of oppression and death in the world, and Jesus was raised from the dead!

All of these stories of awakening are connected by the theme of relationship.

When we are in relationship with someone else, we are better able to understand their needs. This is what happens when we get woke to the needs of the world

around us – we can finally recognize the plight of other people, and how we may have contributed to it, intentionally or not.

The relationships that Jesus had with others motivated him in his ministry.

The relationships that we have with our friends, neighbors, colleagues and acquaintances are what motivate us to wake up and gain new understanding of the world around us.

The relationship that my friend has with his wife helped him be grateful for waking up after surgery, and it's what motivated his first communication as soon as he was conscious enough to communicate anything at all.

The relationship that my nephew and I have is what finally got him to lift up his arms to let me pick him up from his nap... and that trust is also what made him comfortable enough to fall back asleep on my shoulder.

Hopefully the fact that I had to wake him up again hasn't marred our relationship for the future! (I know, it's way easier to be the aunt than the parent. I'll take it.)

Jesus was raised from the dead because of his relationship with God, and his relationship with the women who came to his tomb was what made his resurrection become the foundation of our Christian faith.

Relationships truly can change the world.

Our relationships cause awakenings in our lives.

Relationships make us into new people, similar to how Jesus was raised to new life from the tomb on Easter.

Relationship with God helps us become the person we were meant to be, and can change the world into the place that it was meant to be.

Relationships with other people awaken us to the needs of the world and the ways in which we might respond.

The best measure of being awake is the deepness of your awareness of love.

Sometimes we achieve that level when we're still groggy, like my friend who was waking up from open-heart surgery and signed "I love you" to his wife.

But to hang on to that deep level of awareness? That's a little bit harder. To maintain a deep awareness of love is sometimes more difficult when we are fully conscious. That was Thomas' problem, and even Peter's, when he denied ever knowing Jesus.

Today's Easter encouragement is to always have that understanding of love – whether we are awake or still half asleep.

The encouragement is to be woke – to understand the power plays at work in the world, and to work against them toward the goal of justice for all people.

The encouragement that Jesus gives us this Easter is to imagine what it might have been like to wake up after we've been buried in a tomb, and to take that appreciation for life and share it with the whole world!

Wake up.

Recognize the need of your neighbor.

See the work of God around you.

Find grace in your relationships with God and other people.

And find ways to share your appreciation of justice, love, and new life with every person you encounter!

Amen!