

“UH OH, THIS IS A REALLY BIG RESPONSIBILITY!”

Matthew 18: 15-20 and Romans 13: 8-12

Eastminster Presbyterian Church

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Pastors, like everyone else, enjoy sharing stories, those funny, remarkable, unbelievable, and spiritual moments, especially when it comes to worship. Going through my notes from a preaching conference, I came across this little jewel shared by our keynote speaker, Dr. Tom Are.

“My friend,” he said, “was baptizing a two-year-old.” Trying to decipher my handwriting, I think my note said, Chris. So, Chris it is for this toddler’s name. My note went on to say that Chris was comfortable in the pastor’s arms. There was no crying or trying to cling to his parents. As the water was placed on his head, the pastor repeated the words these words of faith: I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All was still well with Chris. So, the pastor continued, “Chris, you were, are, and will always be a child of God!” Without missing a beat, that toddler uttered only two words: *Uh oh!* Tom told us that his friend said, “You know, who really knows what the kid meant, but would not it be great if all of us took so seriously the awe-filled honor of being a child of God that we said “Uh oh, this is a really big responsibility!”

Imagine if we, even one person at a time, embraced greater responsibility for how we live out our God-given lives, from childhood to adulthood. Unfortunately, our lives are wrapped in the reality that, especially right now, all around us, the world is in chaos. The Creator God in whom I believe did not, and does not, and will not, bring about chaos to teach us hard and harsh lessons.

Out of the chaos of nothingness God created paradise for us. And yet from God’s very good paradise, humans searched, and search, for something even better, as if that existed. Our hardest lessons can be learned, or not, through the consequences of our own sinful human decisions and actions, not some God-placed trick or trial.

In this text Paul is framing our Christian responsibility in the form of action and attitude, some pretty personal actions and attitudes. Believers of Jesus as Lord of our lives are called and commissioned to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and love is never meant for harm.

This message is meant for believers who have given into the dark works of the worlds: drunkenness, immorality, jealousy, unforgiveness, and more. It is meant for me and for you. Wake up, he says. Owe it, ask for forgiveness, give forgiveness, embrace the mercy of the Lord, and extend it to others, and then, dark gives way to light. Be the light of Christ to one another. Change our actions, our attitudes, change our inner clothes and put on Christ's spiritual armor of light. Wake up in the Light!

And we know Paul is not talking about rising in the morning hours to a new day. This is our spiritual wake-up call. We have no concept of God's time, so, in our not knowing, we are to never take time for granted. Living in light calls for all who profess the law of love to actually practice it. And not just practice it, let the love of God, in Christ, be so written into our beings that we are Christ's love to each other.

Leading up to this reading from Romans, Paul has already been describing what it means to live on the side of eternity. Believers put aside self for the good of others, trusting that God's good is the best, much better than what we humans can muster. What sets us on edge in chapter 13 though, is a thing that all too often we think we can control or master...time. So not true, Paul says. To live as a believer is to live the life of Christ right now. And always, in the moment of right now, time is of the essence.

The world is ever changing, and as we live and breath, it is changing right now. And right now, with the rising of the sun, literally and figurately, we have the responsibility to be about our Christian work. Every. Single. Day.

Uh oh! That is a big responsibility.

With so much of Paul's conversion and life experiences centering around light or the absence of light, it is no surprise that he uses the rising of the sun as a metaphor for the beginning of a workday. Minus electricity, batteries, solar panels, Paul is urging Christians to see, as a spiritual metaphor, the sun is about to rise. Christ brings a new day and a new way of living each day. It is good to get up!

Believing in the promise of eternity, with each new day comes the possibility that a life, saved by his Lord's grace, and lived in his Lord's love brings us closer to that a time of celebration, and also, a time for judgment. Paul is pleading for believers to meet their Maker with lives that have fully lived out their responsibility to love

God, to love neighborhood, as self. It was a wake-up call then. It is a wake-up call now.

The world of Christians in Paul's time was in such a mess that he was looking forward to the coming again of Jesus. We are submerged in a chaotic world of our own, and, all these thousands of years later, we are still looking forward to the kind of peace and unity our Lord has promised with his presence.

Here is the big *uh oh* we must remember! Jesus has always been and is and will always be present with us! Faith calls us to live forward, yes; but faith also calls us to live now, knowing Jesus' promise is not for the future only, but for our every, single day!

God's purpose and mission for Jesus was to bring about healing and reconciliation with God, and people with people. Jesus has never stopped, nor will he, living that his responsibility of peace and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the irresponsible ones every time we fail to accept, open, and share those gifts with neighbor and self for the sake of a heavenly kingdom right here, right now on earth.

Our grace-filled *uh-ohs* come when we are living, fully awake every moment of time as loved and loving children of God. Living life as Jesus did is a huge responsibility, but if we live any less than all in. the consequences of our sinful nature destroy us, and the world God so wonderfully created.

The best news, in a world that seems right now to be filled with anything but good news, is this: We have been given a helper, a comforter, an advocate who will help us walk through a joy-filled, mercy-full, peace-possible life if we will wake up to the Spirit of the Lord all around and within and among us.

We need *uh oh* moments, that wake us up to the beauty of responsible living that already covers us with God's blessings. That needed wake-up call was not lost on Paul. He knew, and we know, sometimes it is simply easier to hit the snooze button.

To be awake means we are engaged in the rhetoric of the day, and our day that means everything from ugly social media attacks, hopeless news, the horrors of lost property and lives from fires, floods, hatred, protests, a relentless virus. Oh my and *uh oh*, surely the end is coming! And you know what...it just might be...I do not know...we do not know.

But the God I know in the person of Jesus Christ is said and will keep saying until time's end: wake up and live out, the awesome power of God's love! That kind of responsible living will help awake others to live in gratitude for the blessings that are already ours.

And if we are waiting until we get back in a church sanctuary to do all that living and loving, we have missed the very good message of God's very Good News. Now, and every now, is God's time for living.

Then, good, ole' Matthew pulls no punches either. Living responsibly just might mean a whole lot of *forgiving and forgiven* needs to take place. God's forgiveness through Christ saved our lives; so, *uh oh*, responsible, faithful living asks no less of us with one another. That is the blessed call of being claimed a children of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is time to wake up to the truth of the gospel that we cannot, are not supposed to, live this life apart from the God who breathed life into us, saved that life through Christ and sustains that life through the Spirit.

It is time to wake up to the faithful fact that without our Triune God, our lives are lost.

It is time to wake up to the gospel truth that we need the Lord and we need one another.

And when we mess up, because we will, we need to take the time to ask for forgiveness, and then embrace the mercy of the Lord whose promises us that every single day when we get up we get a second chance.

Then, the responsible believer in us must give that second chance to others.

For some this may be an *uh oh*, time is coming an end. But, it is also surely an *uh oh* moment of waking up to the truth that from the beginning of creation, to the gift of salvation in Jesus, we have been created, claimed and called to the responsible and gratitude-filled life of loving God and loving one another.

The time has come to remember our Lord through the gift of bread and cup, and to keep celebrating the promise of his coming again, in God's time. And, in this holy moment, it is right, and it is responsible to give thanksgiving for the responsible living of our Lord, whose death paid for our salvation, and whose resurrection has

given us many more *uh oh* opportunities to live every single day with love and with gratitude! Amen