

# **Reflection on Zoom Sunday 22 September 2024 by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship**

*(Gospel Reading: Matthew 8. 23-27 Jesus calms the storm)*

## **The importance of sleep**

I hope everyone is well and slept soundly last night. We'll come back to the importance of that in a minute.

The gospel reading from Matthew 8 is a familiar story. Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples. A storm brews up. Jesus falls asleep and the disciples wake him up, fearful that they are going to drown. Jesus calms the storm, and everyone is amazed.

The story, which also appears in the gospels of Mark and Luke, is usually used to illustrate Christ's power on earth, his majesty over the weather and command of the elements. It is also used to reinforce the idea that faith in Christ must include trust in God. Jesus rebukes his disciples for not believing that God would save them from the storm. *You of little faith, why are you so afraid?* he says, and you can almost hear impatience in his voice.

But the point that I feel is often missed in the story is that Jesus is taking a power nap and that is important to him. There are a number of occasions in the Bible when the significance of sleep is stressed. God gave us sleep as a means of recharging our batteries; sleep is often a platform for God to talk to us in our

dreams, sleep is an act of faith when we trust that God will protect us during the night.

Sleep is a blessing from God, a temporary relief from the stress of life, a reminder of God's care for us, and its importance is reflected in the psalms. In Psalm 127 we read: *It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.* Sleep is a time to give ourselves to God. A common bedtime prayer in the time of Christ quoted Psalm 31: *Into your hand Lord I commit my spirit.*

So, I often think that today's gospel story, while it stresses Christ's power over the storm, it is as much about his sleeping; about his sleeping because it highlights a couple of points about the importance of his slumber.

First, it proves that Jesus is fully human: He works hard, he's on his non-stop public speaking tour, and deals with many different people, all of whom want something from him. Given the strains ordinary people experience in their daily work today, the fully human Jesus must have surely suffered from exhaustion during his earthly ministry and he needed his sleep.

Jesus's sleep in the boat is a reminder of his humanity. As a human, he could grow tired, even to a point of exhaustion. So he gets in the boat and lies back like a first-class business traveller on a red-eye flight to New York, and he tries to fit in a nap. Who can blame him?

Second, although Jesus is in human form, he also has full confidence in his divine identity. He can sleep like a baby amid the storm going on around him, secure in the knowledge that he is at one with the Creator, and his time has not yet come. Jesus knows he's not going to die during this storm. When he sleeps in the hull of the boat, he does so in confidence, and for him, it is the right time for a power nap.

God has built specific triggers into our bodies to let us know when it's time to escape consciousness. And wise people listen to these clues. They take power naps. History's most notable power nappers include Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and Winston Churchill. They all closed their eyes for 20 or 30 minutes in the middle of the day.

A recent scientific study confirms that people who nap for at least thirty minutes daily, three times weekly, are one-third less likely to die from heart disease. And additional research suggests that taking a nap can improve creativity and memory. Scientist William Fishbein says that often, during a brief nap, our brains actually keep working to resolve problems and form new ideas. That helps explain why Mozart professed to have composed music in his dreams.

In Scripture, Jesus not only takes frequent rest breaks himself; He encourages His disciples to follow suit.

Sound sleep is a gift. It's not surprising that Jesus was impatient when his disciples woke him up.

As for you and me, in our journey of faith, we shouldn't be embarrassed to take the occasional power nap. We're simply following God's will. And if anyone challenges us, we can quote the story of Jesus calming the storm. His power nap helped save the lives of the disciples in the boat; the disciples who would later spread the word of Christianity. No nap, no faith. And the world would be a very different place. Amen

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