

OUR FRIEND EUTYCHUS

Scripture Lesson: Acts 20:7-12

Text: Acts 20:9

Songs: F3; F26; F29; F18

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Teenagers, when I was your age we had a pastor in one of the churches in Montana who hated it when people slept through his sermons. He was a good preacher with a style that kept most people awake. Yet I felt sorry for the farmers. Many of them worked long, long hours in the hot summer months. They were used to being very active through the week. Then Sunday morning they would sit in church. Then they would go home to a big Sunday dinner. Then in the heat of the afternoon—just about nap time—they would return for the second service. There was no air-conditioning, almost no breeze could come through the massive stained glass windows which were imported from the Netherlands, and it was a preacher's nightmare to keep the men awake as they fought all those natural circumstances which encourage sleep. Under the circumstances, I felt more sorry for the farmers than the preacher who had the daunting task to keep all his parishioners awake on a warm, listless Sunday afternoon.

Yet this pastor was undaunted. He defied the odds and desired to keep everyone awake. He was reputed to have the small pieces of chalk left after his extensive catechism lessons on a small shelf in the pulpit. As he preached he would use the motions of his sermons to throw chalk at the sleepers. I cannot say if that was really true or not since he was not our pastor, but of the neighboring church. Classmates would testify on Monday that they had been hit—never because they had been sleeping but because he was such a poor aim. Yet one hot Sunday afternoon it finally happened. One staunch farmer fell asleep. The chalk kept missing the mark. Finally the minister stopped. He drank his glass of water. He sat down. In the silence of the sanctuary there was only one sound—snoring from about the fourth row back on the west side. Finally the minister rose again and asked the man's son to please shake his father awake. The son did, and the sermon continued. No one knows what the sermon was; all anyone can remember was when Domine stopped the sermon to awaken a sleeping farmer.

That farmer, along with millions of Christians through the centuries, has a friend in Eutychus. Good old Eutychus. He was in the presence of one of the most famous preachers of all time. This was a once-in-a-life-time experience. He fell asleep. Worse yet; in the window. And fell out, down three stories, and was taken up dead. (Acts 20:9)

Who do you think Eutychus was? Could he have been a farmer fighting sleep in the days before air conditioning? We don't know, of course. However, young people, I like to think that Eutychus might have been your age. The Bible does say that he was a "young man." Let's just imagine for a moment that our friend Eutychus was a teenager, an older teen, maybe eighteen.

You live such a busy life! Sometimes it seems that you do not need any sleep. You go late at night and are up early in the morning. Then suddenly it seems that the need for sleep catches up with you. You just have to sleep in some morning. The urge to snooze becomes just too great.

Or let's suppose that our friend Eutychus was in his twenties. That is probably the last decade we can be called "young." He has been working long hours to support his family. There were no pencil-pusher jobs back in the days of Paul. Every one did physical labor. Life was hard work. When you finally got to sit down, drowsiness was not far behind.

Of the two, my guess is that our friend Eutychus was most likely younger, not older. That is why I think

Eutychus was probably a younger person—a teenager, at most twenty something. Really, though, his age does matter. Eutychus is a friend of all who have ever struggled to stay awake in church. He is every man...and woman...and child. He is a friend for all of us.

I can see it in my mind's eye. I picture an upper room just jammed the people. It is hot. Paul himself says he was no eloquent speaker. He writes that seven times in his letters to the Corinthians. Then he preached on and on. Unlike the old time hours-long preachers in our tradition, Paul had no Dutch psalms to sing to wake the people up between points two and three. Eutychus felt drowsy. He looked down—a long way down. Later his head jerked. He pinched himself to stay awake. Surely within minutes Paul would quit preaching.

Then it happened. A snoozing Eutychus fell backwards out the window. You can be sure of one thing, his snooze was over and he snapped wide awake. From snooze to snap in a single second!

Immediately Eutychus' life flashed in front of him. We know the pattern from those who have faced death and survived. In a single moment life lays out before them like a snazzy video. In that first moment when Eutychus snapped awake he thought about his life.

As he passed the second story window on the way to a certain death when he hit the ground below, he no doubt thought about his sins. He remembered the moments of disobedience to his parents at home. He remembered the times he was not always true to his friends. He remembered complaining about Synagogue worship. In those first agonizing seconds his sins likely passed before his mind like a raging torrent.

Then God-fearer or Christian that Eutychus was, he began to think of Jesus. While he anticipated the pain of a single thump against the ground, he thought of all that Christ had suffered for him. His agony would be nothing like Christ's agony. As he passed the first story window his thoughts were filled with the powerful message that Paul had brought. In his mind echoed the certainty of salvation and the calm assurance that indeed all things do work together for good to those who are called according to God's purpose. He likely felt something of the calm assurance that Paul experienced when he said that while it was better to be alive for those he loved, for himself as a person the great gain was to be in heaven with Jesus. Eutychus was facing that momentarily. He snapped awake to have the sudden reminder of his sin and assurance of his salvation.

Of course, that is not the end of the story. The end of the story is that Paul went down and raised him to life. In what I find one of the most remarkable events in Paul's missionary journeys is that after Paul raised Eutychus to life, had admitted that he was a rather boring preacher and yet continued the sermon until dawn. It makes sense, I suppose. No one was going to sleep after Eutychus. Back in Montana it was a long time before anybody slept during that preacher. If there was a shred of possibility that you would sleep, you would stay home. Here they had but one opportunity to hear Paul, and they made the most of it.

Notice the security at the close of the account. "v. 12." We have no further record of Eutychus. Our friend just passes through the pages of the Bible in this single moment. That sleeper in Montana happened almost fifty years ago and people have not yet forgotten it. Could the Troas congregation ever forget Eutychus, not only because he snoozed, but because he snapped awake and then was raised from the dead? How many times in the life of the Troas congregation they must have reflected on that incident.

Out of that experience came a great sense of security to the congregation. Eutychus was alright. Not only was he alive, he was able to tell others how the thoughts of sin and forgiveness rushed through his mind as he fell. That is why the concluding line is so powerful, "and they were greatly comforted."

In this season of the year we face the same two issues in life. We see our sin in stark reality. We see Jesus, dying and rising. They are our source of comfort. In the various situations of our lives, we have not always

found living to be easy. In our church family circle this year we have people who have faced tough circumstances. Among friends who worship with us are some of the same tensions of life. Thanks be to the risen Lord, we have enough love and grace to embrace all who hurt until they are healed. No, we do not have the gift of bringing people back to life as did Paul, but we do have the gift to turn our lives around by God's grace, and to stand as a friend to those who are working so hard to turn their lives around. As this year begins our friend Eutychus reminds us that as the sins of our lives flash before us, so does the salvation of our Savior. And we are greatly comforted.

Let's thank God together in prayer.