

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 708 Believe not those who say

Reading: Mark 13.32-37

Prayers:

I believe it's a very serious offence
for a soldier to go to sleep whilst on guard duty.
Keeping awake, being on guard,
is a vital part of any military operation.
If the guards sleep then the camp lies open to attack
with no one to give a warning or to defend it.

The story Mark gives us is probably different
from the one that Jesus originally told.
No one in Palestine would have travelled
on a long journey during the hours of dark.
Night time, however, is that part of the day
when we are easily off our guard,
when we cease to be vigilant.
In the past it was considered a time of danger.
when evil spirits lurked around.
Even today there are people
who do not like to go out "after dark".

In the story Mark tells it sounds as though the servants
are to keep away awake 24/7,
which is clearly an impossibility.
The point is that no one knows
when the master of the house will return,
whether it will be sooner or later
and the possibility that he will return when people least expect him!
In Luke's Gospel a similar story tells of householder
going off to a banquet and the servants are told
to stay up and keep watch until he returns.
That captures the feeling of staying awake,
being alert and ready for the master when he comes back
so that everything will be found in order.
He doesn't expect to find a disorderly household!

The first Christians believed this age would soon end.
As the years passed the end didn't come and Jesus didn't return.
Was this waiting, then, all a nonsense?
The story tells those early Christians
that there will be an end to this age but we don't know when.
Their duty was to remain faithful, loving and alert through the years!
What does this story say to us?

1. It is an everyday warning

Yesterday, newspapers were saying

that it was the end of the banking system in Britain
as we have known it.
I wish I could be at the Opera House tonight
to listen to the comments of Wedgie Benn
on what has been happening to the world economies.
Here is a man who in the 1970's proposed
that the banks be nationalised
living to see it happening to no small extent
both here and in America.
We may not accept his economic analysis
but we from government to ordinary people like ourselves
we have failed to "keep awake"
and to be on guard against our human greed and stupidity!

2. It's a warning about being prepared for the end

There's a story told by Gordon Rupp
of how during the Second World War
he went up to work at the bank in London each day.
He passed one store which for week after week
was proclaiming: "Great Closing Down Sale".
People began to laugh as weeks became months
and still it remained open.
Then, one morning after a heavy airraid
the shop was just a charred, roofless building.
It had indeed closed down.

None of us knows when we will be called upon
to give an account of our lives.
Sometimes that moment comes in the midst of life.
I doubt if six months ago those bankers
who lost their jobs yesterday
thought they would have to shortly give an account
of their stewardship as Chief Executives.

Jesus encourages us to stand fast by our faith
and to keep living it out at each moment
so that when the end comes we may hear those words,
"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."
I know in myself how easily
I can become sloppy in my thinking
and careless in my words and actions,
in the way I use those gifts God has given me.
Jesus says to me and to us all, "Keep awake. Stay alert.
Don't give up or let your love die down.
Remain close to Christ
that you will not be appalled when you see him face to face
but rejoice in his presence. Amen.