

## Sermon for September 18, 2016

### "I Can't Sleep!"

Psalm 4

"I can't sleep!" Insomnia is a most hideous condition. Sleep is necessary for us to live. Without it the body eventually breaks down. It is also important to our mental and emotional well-being. While we sleep we dream and those dreams are often our mind's way of working out the conflicts and problems of the day.

But sleep is more than just a time of unconsciousness. It is also a metaphor for peace. Peace in a sense is the sleep of the soul. Just as the body and the mind need a rest from the day's trials so the soul needs a rest to bring peace. Without this rest of the soul, the result is spiritual turmoil. Just as the body would die without sleep, and the mind is lost without rest, so the soul dies without peace.

But there is so much that takes peace out of our lives. There are worries about the state of the world: wars, plagues, natural disasters. Will the forces of evil in all these conflicts win out and what will be the effect? There are worries about our communities. Drugs, AIDS, crime.... Will some drug crazed person break into my house, my home? And there are worries about the future. Will I get cancer, will someone I love develop Alzheimer's, will the family finances hold out? And we worry about the ones we love. Will they find eternal peace? Will our children or grandchildren find happiness and meaning in life? And sometimes we lose sleep over these worries and often they rob us of peace.

So why all this talk of sleep and rest. You may be wondering if I have been suffering from insomnia. Well the author of Psalm 4 seems to have been worried and having trouble sleeping. He begins with a desperate plea to God, "Answer me when I call, O God of my right." And after praying through his troubles he concludes, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety."

I imagine the psalmist lying down at night and not being able to sleep. He is worried and that worry keeps him awake so he prays. And what is he worried about? For one, some people have told lies about him and others have believed those lies. But in faith the psalmist says, "I know that the Lord has set apart the righteous." Despite the fact that other people believe the lies, he knows God will hear and listen to him. But while the psalmist is hurt by the lies of his enemies, he also cares about them.

Finally he takes his own advice and puts his trust in the Lord. The result is a finale of praise. "You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound." And finally he can sleep: "In peace I will both lie down and sleep." Why can he sleep? "For you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety."

So, you may wonder, am I having trouble sleeping? Not literally, but in the sense of finding peace, I would have to say "yes." Like the psalmist it worries me that people believe the lies that world tells them. I am concerned that because they believe the lie, they miss out on knowing God. It worries me that people are dying, literally dying, around us because they don't know the love of God. And sometimes these worries weigh heavily upon me and I pray as I try to find some rest. Sometimes like the psalmist I lie awake bearing my soul to God.

Just listen to or watch the news. We live in a world filled with violence. There are wars and terrorism. In our own communities there is child abuse and elder abuse and spouse abuse. If you believe the rhetoric from the politicians, it seems things will just get worse no matter who gets elected! What can we do?

It's not that we don't care, because we do. It's that so often we don't know what to do. How do we reach the young and tell them that there is a reason to live: Jesus? How do we share the love of God with people who often don't want to be bothered by strangers? How do we take the

light of Christ into a dark and dying world? How do we speak up for love and righteousness in an angry and violent world? And our lack of knowing what to do makes us even more anxious.

I believe there are two important lessons to learn from this psalmist. First of all, there would be a problem if we were not disturbed. It is good that the world around us makes us uneasy. It's good that we can see the evil and feel the pain of our neighbor. It's good that our peace is disturbed by the lost-ness and the darkness of this world. It's good that we wrestle with how to bring about justice and don't just go off half-cocked.

If we were not disturbed by the world as, it is then we would really be in trouble. It is those who are beyond being disturbed by the evil that are really dead. They are nothing more than the walking dead because their souls have lost all sensitivity. The people who are at peace with the turmoil of our world are not resting like one who sleeps but like one who is dead.

The fact that we do care, that we are disturbed, is a sign that we are spiritually alive. It's evidence that God is at work in our lives. It shows us that God's love is in our hearts making them hurt and break for the lost souls. It is Christ alive in us that gives our spirits the ability to be disturbed. It's good that we lose a little sleep over the people we care for.

The second lesson I learn from the psalmist is this: Only God can give true peace and rest. He prayed, "For you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety." God is the one who gives us the sensitivity to be disturbed by our world. God is also the one who can give us peace and rest.

So, if you can't sleep at night, if you have trouble resting, if worries keep you awake, take this psalmist's advice. "Put your trust in the Lord."

When you are disturbed by the problems of our world and your helplessness in the face of them. Turn to the one who is not helpless. And God will give you peace. Not a peace like the world gives; for that is nothing more than a cold numbness. But God will make you lie down in peace for God alone will make you lie down in safety.

We have an advantage over the Psalmist: we have the example and living presence of Jesus with us. You remember how the disciples felt after Jesus' crucifixion. They had witnessed Jesus being arrested and crucified and three days later they were frightened and were hiding in the upper room. Reports had begun to filter in first that Jesus' body was stolen then that he was alive. In fact two disciples had just reported that Jesus had appeared to them on the road and in the breaking of the bread in Emmaus.

Then Jesus himself appeared with them and his first words were "Peace be with you." Luke says they were "startled and terrified." But Jesus put them at ease and showed them that he was real and not a ghost. Then he opened their minds to the truth of the resurrection. And he told them to be his witnesses proclaiming the truth to all the nations.

This is the lesson. Jesus is with us in the midst of our worries and troubles. He gives us peace in the midst of the turmoil of the world. But he also goes with us into that chaotic world. And with his help we can do something about the evils and dangers that worry us.

Are you worried? Are there things that keep you awake at night? Good, if this world did not concern you then you would really be in trouble. But know that you can trust in God. And remember that Jesus is with you and will give you the peace and strength you need to face life.

If you are worried remember this. The risen Christ is here with us just as he was with the disciples so long ago. And Jesus is saying, "Peace be with you." Know that God will make you lie down in peace for God alone will make you lie down in safety.

Go forth then in peace. Go forth to proclaim the truth of God's love and presence. Go forth and make peace where there is violence and war. Go forth knowing that you do not go alone. Jesus says, "Peace be with you," and "Be my witnesses of these things!"