

**“Are you ready?”**

*With what kind of awareness do we embrace the world?*

**July 13, 2008**

*Text: Isaiah 55:10-13, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

I.

In this season of *election fever*, with change all about us—certainly, with the economy and with the upward swing in prices, are we dialed in? Are we awake to the *signs of the times*?

All the time, there are forces at work around us, trying to bend us one way or another. With the pressures of globalization, the call for immigration reform; with global warming, the challenge of alternative energy and the competition for foreign oil. And, of course, with the war on terror and the ongoing wars that we’re fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Are we tuned in to the realities of these days? Are we awake? Are we ready to embrace the new world that is rising up around us with every passing day? Again, are we awake to the signs of the times?

What time is it?

II.

A man had been driving all night and by morning was still far from his destination. So he decided to stop at the next city he came to and park somewhere quiet so he could catch an hour or two of sleep. Sure enough, as luck would have it, the quiet place he chose happened to be one of the cities’ major jogging routes.

No sooner had he settled back for a snooze when there was a brisk knocking on the window. He looked out and saw a jogger running in place ...

**Yes**, the man said, **can I help you?** *Yes, excuse me, sir, but do you have the time?*

The weary man looked at his watch and replied, **It’s 8:15 a.m.**

The jogger said thanks and left. The man settled back again and was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window and another jogger.

*Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?* Checking his watch again, *it’s 8:25 a.m.*

*Thanks*, the jogger said, and off he went.

By now the sleepy traveler could see other joggers passing by and he knew it would be only a matter of time before another one disturbed him. To avoid any more interruptions, he got a pen and a piece of paper and put a sign on the window that read: **I do NOT know the time.**

Settling back to sleep once again ... a short time passed and then there was a sudden knock on the window. **Sir, sir**, said the jogger, seeking to be helpful. **It's 8:45 a.m.**

I don't know about you, but I'm very much aware of time. In fact, I tend to think about time ... all the time. Will I have enough time for this or that, as I plan my day? And I don't like wasting time. Are you like that? Trying to maximize time management situations??

And I like to have some clue about what's going on. Like with a game or sports event, with a conversation or current events. I like to be *tuned in*; I want to be ready.

There's a Starbucks Coffee ad that goes: **Life is short—stay awake!** I couldn't agree more. We gotta be ready. 'Cause all the time, stuff is happening.

### III.

In our **parable** from Matthew's gospel, a SOWER goes out to sow ... to sow seeds of wisdom, seeds of insight and learning ... seeds that will transform into new vision and new purpose.

The question for us this morning is: will these seeds fall in places where they can be nurtured and ultimately harvested? Friends, we are the ground *upon which* and *into which* the seeds will fall.

How receptive are we? Are we prepared? **Are we ready?**

In the **parable**, Jesus talks about the seeds falling in places of varying readiness—on *the path*, on *rocky ground*, among the *thorns* (ouch!), and lastly, on *good soil*.

On the path, the rocky ground, and among the thorns, over time, problems arise; but on the good soil, grain in abundance springs forth. Jesus' conclusion about this: **let anyone with ears listen!**

Again, are we listening? Are we awake?

In the scriptures, there's always this sense of urgency. The implication is that *time* is of the essence. In Paul's times (first century Palestine)—and this is reflected in his writings—there was this lingering sense that *salvation* was near ... that Jesus was coming ... and that time, therefore, was fleeting.

The gospels talk about the *signs of the times* and the importance of being ready. In our reading this morning, the readiness has to do with receiving Christ, or receiving the word of God.

To help us get a handle on this, it's useful to think of *receiving Christ* as a total transformation in the way we see the world. We *see* the world through different lenses, in new and fresh ways.

To begin with, the reality of *Christ* in the world has to do with sacrificial love and with living lives of compassion and humility. Why? Because this was the life that Christ lived; this was the essence, the core, of his nature and spirit.

When we live our lives in this way, we see the BIG PICTURE of our lives and, instantly, have a sense of what really matters. And we live our lives and make decisions in relation to this BIG PICTURE.

#### IV.

So again, are we ready to receive the seeds of the SOWER? Are our mind, heart and spirit ready to be the *good soil*—the soil that springs forth abundance?

Are we ready? Are we awake?

Do we see the importance of *doing today* the very things that will enable us to be the person we want to be at end of our days? This is such an important point, because we live in an obsessively *immediate gratification* culture ... where everything is short-term perspective.

That's why we're in the economic mess we're in with the sub-prime lending situation. That's why we have an over dependence on foreign oil. And that's why we went into Iraq with faulty intelligence and no end-game strategy.

And yet, having said all of this ... what continues to be amazing: *are we paying attention?*

Are we awake? Are we ready? Or do we continue to buy in to the spin masters—in the media and on the political front?

#### V.

Let's look at the situations depicted in the **parable** where, clearly, there wasn't sufficient readiness!

If we're not the *good soil*, but the *path*, we're functioning totally on the surface. There's

no depth at all; no place for the seed to even be planted. We're jumping all over the place with no planning, no vision ... a certain recipe for failure.

If we're not the *good soil*, but the *rocky ground*, the seeds are planted but there's no root system, no foundation. The seeds grow, but only for a time because we haven't done our homework; we haven't done the background work. We haven't sufficiently prepared ourselves by looking ahead and anticipating consequences.

It happens all the time. And the words of Jesus ring out: ***Let anyone with ears listen!***

If we're not the *good soil*, but the *thorns*, the seeds are planted and the seeds grow but—everywhere—there's temptation ... greed ... and, again, short-term schemes for profit and getting ahead.

The problem among the thorns is values clarification and a mature *sorting out* of who we are and what's important. Again, BIG PICTURE. Are we awake to the BIG PICTURE of our lives? Because, friends, when we *are*—not the path, not the rocky ground, and not the thorns—but the *good soil*, the BIG PICTURE is what it's all about.

And when that's our focus, we *get it*. We *get* what's important and easily our values and commitments are sorted out. And we make the decisions we need to make to be the person we need to be.

## VI.

A minister tells of a conversation he had with **Felton Yeargen**, the lead singer of the band, ***Homeland***, when they visited his church for a concert. The band had apparently played in lots of churches in that same part of the country.

Along the way, Yeargen had noticed that a number of the congregations were going through difficult times. From Yeargen's point of view, the cause of their problems was pretty basic: *they had lost a sense of their purpose*. Gradually, no doubt, over time, they had forgotten *to keep the main thing the main thing*.

Are we awake? Are we ready? Aware of the *main thing* in our lives and are we *keeping the main thing the main thing*? Friends, the main thing is the BIG PICTURE, which is ***God's purposes***.

And every day, every moment, what we do, the choices we make, help realize this BIG PICTURE.

Do we have our priorities right with our lives? Are we doing what we think would be pleasing to God? Are we learning from our past? Are we dealing in good and helpful ways with our imperfections and failures? And are we moving forward? Are we accepting God's forgiveness and allowing the spirit to renew us?

## VII.

Our mission every day is to prepare ourselves to embrace the world of today. Many of us have lots on our plate ... all kinds of difficult and stressful situations we're trying to deal with and work through.

Our lives are NOT easy.

But still, everyday is an opportunity; it is a free gift from our Creator God. And it's important that we be the *good soil* into which God's word and the gifts of God's spirit come.

Always, friends, the Spirit is on the move ... nudging us, prompting us to pay attention ... to be alive to the times.

In **Isaiah 55**, the prophet is trying desperately to inspire the people to trust in God's presence in their lives and to believe the promises of the *abundant life*, which have everything to do with love and compassion and doing the *right* thing, again and again.

***Incline your ear***, says the prophet, ***and come to me; listen so that you may live***. The light of God's purposes thrives in our heart and spirit reassuring us—day after day—that *just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth*,

*So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, says God.  
It shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose ...*

Are we awake? Are we ready? ***Let anyone with ears listen!***

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz  
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*  
6701 Miami Lakeway South  
Miami Lakes, FL 33014  
On the web at [www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)

