

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, February 23, 2020
Transfiguration Sunday

“Spiritual Narcolepsy”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Hebrew Scripture: Exodus 24:12-18

Christian Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9

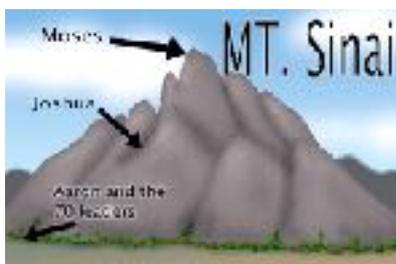
This week I am thankful for my family that is the Centre Congregational Church. In a time of great need, the Svec family has lent me a Subaru so I can be a 100% *bona fide* Vermonter.



I am in great need because on a visit to Pat Neer, a deer jumped-out into Upper Dummerston road and hit my vehicle. So, my pride and joy is in the shop for over two weeks and I have no ‘ride’. This unfortunate incident makes me wish I would have had my car blessed by, our neighbour, Father Justin, at St. Michael’s. I have been dealing with many adjusters, insurance companies, and auto body shops. My wish to have had my car blessed reminds me of a story.



A Catholic priest was approached by a congregant who asked if he could get his new car blessed. "Sorry, son, the Church doesn't do that anymore." "But Father, surely there's something you can do." So the priest rummaged around and found an old prayer book from yesteryear, found such a prayer, and, reluctantly, and offered it for the congregant's car. A week later, the car ran into a deer and was totalled. The priest tried to avoid the congregant as long as he could, but then, after a mass, there was the congregant in his face. The priest thought frantically, and then said, "Son, you remember that prayer I did for your car. It didn't cover deer".



Well, let us talk about prayer. In our Hebrew scripture reading, Moses with Joshua went to the top of the mountain, apparently, I presume, to pray. The story tells us that a cloud covered the mountain for six days. Then on the seventh day, God called-out to Moses from

the cloud. When the Israelites observed the mountain, the glory of the Lord appeared like a “devouring fire” (Exodus 24:17). Then Moses went into the cloud and prayed for a loooooong time! Forty days and forty nights, neither eating nor drinking, he listened to God’s instructions (24:18 and 34:28). During this time, Moses received the Ten Commandments and all the Law.



Later in Exodus 34, the scriptures state that whenever Moses spoke to the Israelites after praying with God, he would put a veil over his face to cover the glory of God that was shown thereon (Exodus 34:34). No, this was not a case of Moses forgetting to put-on enough matt powder make-up to diminish shiny skin as a result of an acne breakout. No, the glory of the Lord being shown on Moses was symbolic of the literal ‘interface’ between God and God’s messenger. Friends, in Exodus, it was demonstrated that to be the equivalent of a human lightbulb to be the physical manifestation or embodiment of an epiphany, a divine revelation, wisdom passed-on from God to us.



Now, what I would like to point-out is that during the forty days, the Israelites had many nights during which, I presume, they had as many sleeps. During this time of trial, the Israelite's grew impatient with Moses' absence and experienced what I call 'spiritual narcolepsy'. During this time of spiritual sleepiness, they forgot how God and Moses were leading them. They forgot the instructions given to them. They drifted away. They went their own direction, and built the golden calf of idolatry.



The story for the Transfiguration is told to convey the same story, but it is Jesus who becomes the 'new Moses', the new, the greatest, and the last prophet. All the same points in Exodus are there found in Matthew but with a few small changes. Instead of Joshua, it is Peter, James, and John that accompany the prophet. They go up a high mountain. Like Moses, Jesus' face glowed bright with the glory of God.

But unlike just Moses, not just Jesus' face glowed, but rather his entire body - all his clothes became bright like the sun!

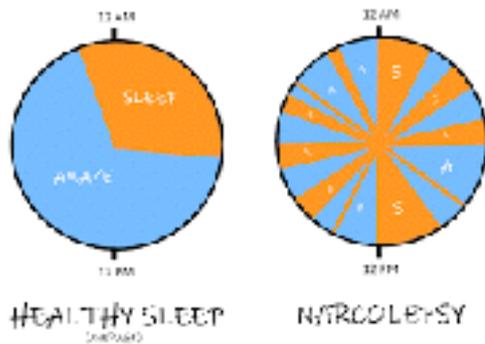


In Matthew's gospel, we have the recurring motif of the voice of God coming out of a cloud speaking to Jesus and the disciples just as God spoke to Moses. And like the Israelites, the disciples are shown to be susceptible to spiritual snoozing.



Peter suggests to God that he should set-up camp by erecting tents, so that everyone could get some rest. Since Peter knew the scriptures so well, he rightfully put-together in his mind: God, the mountain, the shiny face, and the cloud. Peter logically assumed that they might be there for forty days and forty nights and thus would need some shelter. In wanting to erect tents, Peter was recognizing that his and other

disciple's attention spans were short like the Israelites', that they were prone to getting tired, of sleeping, and forgetting that which they have heard and learned before.



“Narcolepsy is a neurological disorder that affects your ability to wake and sleep. People with narcolepsy have excessive, uncontrollable daytime sleepiness. [...] People with narcolepsy go into REM sleep (rapid eye movement) almost immediately in the sleep cycle and sometimes while they’re awake.”¹



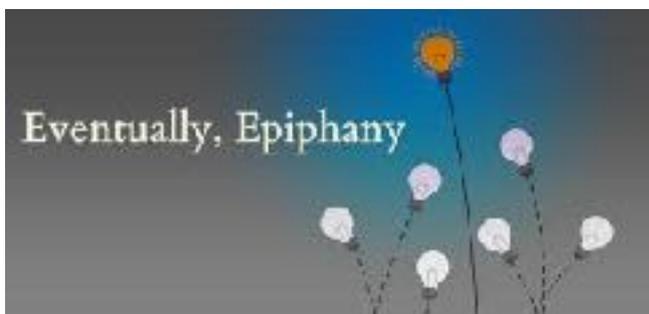
This morning, I am warning us that what can happen neurologically can happen spiritually. As we journey to the cross and the resurrection during Holy Week, it will be difficult not to go to

¹ “Narcolepsy”, <https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/narcolepsy#1>, accessed 22 February 2020.

sleep, to want to build tents, to continue the status quo, and to forget that which we have learned during Epiphany.



Friends, from Wednesday we will enter the season of Lent. We will begin the same journey to Easter as undergone by the Israelites for forty days and forty nights. And we, like the Israelite's will get a bit lackadaisical, we will get bored waiting, we will get distracted, we will get sleepy, and we, like the Israelites, will want to go our own way.



We will during these next forty days until Easter be susceptible to 'spiritual narcolepsy' whereby we will forget all the spiritual lessons taught to us by Bonnie Girvan (seeing God in others), Lee Moore (being reassured of eternal life), Holly Kennedy (the importance of grace), Steve Mundahl (knowing God has a purpose for us), Laura Slate (the freeing effect of penance), and Jenifer Ambler (with God there are no such thing as coincidence). That is why this Lent we will hand-out

calendars to assist us to keep focused, to prevent us from getting sleepy, to keep us from wanting to build tents and maintaining the status quo, and to prevent our predisposition to suffer from ‘spiritual narcolepsy’.



As you know, at Jesus’ greatest hour of need, the disciples fell asleep in the garden.

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.