

LENT DEVOTIONAL 2019



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LENT DEVOTIONAL APRIL 21, 2019

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 51:9-11

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord!
Awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?
10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to cross over?
11 So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Joseph Hedden Jr. '97, President, Alumnae/i Council, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary / Pastor, Emmanuel Reformed (Hill's) Church of the United Church of Christ, Export, Pa.

For those of us who have learned to pray carefully crafted petitions, the rawness of the prophet's appeal is shocking. Throwing out courtesy and convention, the prophet pleads with the Lord to awaken! To act! To rescue! To save! The unspoken implication is that, throughout the awful night of the Babylonian exile and trouble, the Lord has been asleep.

Yes, in bygone days the Lord did act in mighty ways at the Red Sea. But today? "Awake, Lord, Awake!" Surrounded by lilies, a full choir, and Easter joy, can any of us imagine begging the Lord to wake up as the pastor approaches the pulpit to lead worship? Surely we preachers will want to move on quickly to verse 11 and its future day and future hope.

But not so fast. Perhaps the prophet is struggling to identify and name a reality deep within the human soul. There are times when we live in the shadow of the cross—and not the triumphant and gleaming bronze cross of the Easter sanctuary but, rather, Calvary's wooden cross of injustice, pain, and death. We know moments when words cleave to the tongue and all we can ask the Lord is, "Where are you?" The prophet's appeal to the Lord may not be pretty, but it is *real*. "Awake, awake, arm of the Lord" is the unadorned prayer of struggle clawing toward hope. It is the prayer we pray at bedsides and late at night in the half-empty Intensive Care lounge. "Awake, arm of the Lord" is the doubtful prayer of faith and the faithful prayer of doubt. Perhaps "Awake, arm of the Lord" is the appropriate prayer of sorrow and loss on a dark and misty pre-dawn journey to a tomb in Jerusalem—a journey at the end of which we discover that the Lord is, indeed, awake!

PRAYER

Awake, arm of the Lord! We remember your deeds of love and grace and ask you to make them real to us today. See us here in our struggles; our wrestling with doubt, our passion for justice, and our search for healing. May you provide the words and memories when they fail us. May your strong arm remind us of the hope of the empty tomb, which turns our world on its head. We pray in the name of the resurrected Christ. Amen.

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