

It is the hour for you to awake from sleep.

I guess I was about 3 to 4 years old when in the middle of the night I was awakened by sounds from downstairs, climbed out of my bed and walked through the dark to the head of the staircase overlooking the living room. There were lights on and so I advanced about two or three steps down and sat there behind the banister taking in what was going on.

What surprised me was the tall presence of an evergreen tree where there had been a sofa. It was lit up with small bulbs of red and green and blue and orange. From its branches hung ornaments of different, colorful shapes – veiled in tinsel. A star presided at the top.

Underneath the branches a whole village of miniature houses (each illuminated from within) had surfaced around a stable like structure where miniature people were gathered worshipfully around an infant in a crib of sorts. From my somewhat mindless, imageless world of my own infancy I had my first awakening from a sleep that was more than a bedtime thing – but more like the sleep from which the biblical boy Samuel, indeed the human race was called to somehow fashion intelligently and gracefully a meaningful world out of raw nature.

I of course didn't realize *that then*, but it was the beginning of other moments, engagements with biblical writing (such as today's first and second readings) and other stories, experiences, significant mentors, mistakes, recoveries . . . that convinced me that something deeper than natural was going on, that our lives are not just to be lived out grazing on the grass or biologically; that as human beings we have been launched into an ADVENTure personally and collectively, not only beyond the horizons of space but even the horizons of time. For instance I am certainly now more informed and I hope wiser than the fascinated boy sitting at the head of that staircase. (On the other hand at times I wish I could recover his "fascination").

Today's Gospel reading presents us with a key or guideline as we make our way through our lives as an adventure. Readiness for surprise – such as the surprise I experienced when my living room changed from the usual to the wonderful. It's something you should be ready for – moments that leave you of a different mind than the eating and drinking and grinding at the mill of monotonous time.

You can't predict those moments; but you can expect them. They may creep up on you from a word spoken, a person you meet, a poem that moves you – or like my meeting Jane or a Eucharist that is suddenly no longer routine. The truly true seeps in or as the Gospel says can creep up on you like a thief in the night or a tree in a parlor. Therefore, stay awake.

Without such expectancy, such faith and hope and the love they evoke, there are the inundations of chaos – never final – like wars, uncompromising politics, boredom, overindulgence, depression, lost generations . . . "as in the days of Noah".

