Most of us probably use an alarm clock or an alarm on our phones to tell us when it’s time to get up in the morning. I use one, although sometimes the four-legged alarm clock (my dog) gets me up before the alarm rings.

If I didn’t have either the clock or the dog to wake me, I’d be likely to sleep through something important – especially if that something is happening first thing in the morning. I’d sleep through whatever God had prepared for me in that encounter. I’d miss whatever God had called me to do as a disciple in that encounter.

We’re called as Christians to be awake and watchful – to be open to where God is at work. We’re called to encounter God wherever God is and to join in the work God is doing. Sure, Jesus came once in a manger in Bethlehem. And Jesus will come again in the end times. But Jesus also comes to us in small ways and encounters every day. These are moments when the Kingdom of God is present with us on earth. Jesus wants to gather us up and have us participate in those kingdom moments, just as God gathered up Noah’s family and put them into the ark.

The challenge is that we sometimes go through life oblivious to these little encounters with God. We have our routines. We get up; we go to work; we come home; we eat; we watch TV; we go to bed. We see our friends; we go to funerals; we go to weddings. We become so embroiled in these everyday activities of life that we let them lull us into a stupor. We don’t see Jesus in the face of those we encounter every day. We don’t hear the voice of God telling us to help another person in a specific way. We don’t hear the voice of God calling us to go and share God’s love with our neighbor.

We become like folks in a recent research study on the topic of inattentional blindness. In the study, researchers from Western Washington University tested whether people would actually see money growing on trees. They clipped the money to branches of the tree so that the branches became so bent that they hung down over the path at almost eye level. People often had to duck to avoid hitting their head on the branch. You would think everyone would have seen the money before them.

Here are the results: 396 people were observed walking down the path. Only 12 people failed to see and avoid the tree, but most people failed to see the money in the tree. And a whopping 94 percent of people on a cell phone were so distracted that they didn't spot the money. The authors of the study ended the study with a rather obvious but important conclusion: "Becoming aware of an object is generally assumed to require focused attention."[[1]](#endnote-1)

When God comes to us in the faces of other people or through experiences in our lives, some of us are open and alert. These people respond to God’s call and are gathered up into God’s kingdom on earth at that moment. Others keep on with their without even noticing that God has come.

Maybe we’re not all totally oblivious to God’s coming. In fact, we have times when we become a little aware of God’s coming. We hear God’s call as it sounds in our hearts just like that alarm clock that we barely hear break through a sound sleep. Some of us wake out of that sound sleep. We are open. We encounter God and do what God calls us to do.

Others of us hit the snooze button and turn over and go back to sleep. We just shake off what we sense God is calling us to do if it’s inconvenient or uncomfortable or takes time and money that we would rather use for something else than use for God.

So how do we focus our attention on God? How do we hear the alarm, wake up and get to work in God’s kingdom without hitting the snooze button. We do it through prayer – many times a day. In our prayers we ask God to open our hearts and minds to see where God is at work in the world and to give us strength to join God. We also become alert to God’s coming through Scripture. We read about how God has acted throughout ancient history so that we can recognize how God is acting today. We know that God comes to dwell within all persons. So we look for God in the faces and hearts of others.

David Vryhof, a brother in the Society of St John the Evangelist asks us: “Are we open to God speaking to us in the language of everyday events? Are we willing to hear God’s admonitions and to accept God’s guidance, or are we happier to justify our selfish behaviors and chart our own way in life?” Then Vryhof adds a prayer: “May the Lord find in us hearts that are open and ready to receive him, whenever and however he chooses to come to us.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

[*Alarm rings*]

Wake up! God dwells with us. Let’s join Him.

1. *Matt Woodley, Editor, PreachingToday.com; sources: Ira E Hyman, "Failure to see money on a tree," Frontiers in Psychology (4-23-14); Melissa Dahl, "People on Their Phones Don't Notice Free Cash," Science of Us (6-18-14)* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. David Vryhof, SSJE, “Brother, Give Us a Word,” Society of Saint John the Evangelist (12/10/2018) found in Synthesis, A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship Following the Revised Common Lectionary, December, Year A [↑](#endnote-ref-2)