

EASTER C

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

The Resurrection Sleep Number # 1520

Kamato Hongo of Kagoshima, Japan, passed away,
and her death may have gone unmentioned
except for the fact that she died at the age of 116 —
at the time, the world's oldest person.

Hongo was born on April 8, 1887, married in 1914,
had seven children, and lots of grandchildren,
great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

She died with her sense of humor still quite active,
and on the day of her death, she performed a little hand dance
peculiar to her native region in Japan.

But forget she's 116. Here's the interesting part: When she was 110,
she had a hip operation, and after the operation,
her sleeping habits began to change.

She would sleep an entire day, which was then followed
by being up for an entire day.

When she died, she was sleeping for two solid days,
followed by two days of staying wide awake.

For the five years before her death this was her custom.

Here's a lady who obviously had discovered her sleep number.

What's our sleep number?

Our Resurrection Sleep Number is 1520.

We'll get to that in a few minutes.

Sleep numbers. That's the gimmick

one major manufacturer of mattresses uses

to sell its sleeping systems —

mattresses that promise to reduce pressure points,

provide for proper spinal adjustment,

let you sleep on a hard surface while your spouse

sleeps on a soft one, and such a sleep system

can be yours for an enormous amount of sleep number dollars.

Kamoto Hongo had no trouble sleeping, and when she died,

you could say she entered her final rest.

She went to her eternal sleep.

In fact there is a long tradition, in which sleep is a metaphor for death,
and the sleep/awakening cycle a metaphor for resurrection.

Scripture is full of such allocations.

Today's text itself suggests this metaphor:

***“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,
the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep”*** (v. 20 NIV).

Earlier in this same chapter, the apostle Paul

uses the same metaphor: ***“After that, [Jesus] appeared
to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time,
most of whom are still living,
though some have fallen asleep”*** (v. 6 NIV).

Even Jesus spoke of death as being sleep:

Speaking to his bumfuzzled disciples, he said,

***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep,
but I am going there to awaken him.”***

The disciples said to him, ***“Lord, if he has fallen asleep,***

he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ***“Lazarus is dead”*** (John 11:11-14).

Not surprising, then,

to find the concept in the canons of literature as well.

Shakespeare records a befuddled Hamlet pondering his existence in his famous

“To be or not to be” soliloquy:

To die: to sleep;

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: aye, there the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil. (Hamlet, III.1.61 68)

William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) regards death as something akin to lying down on the couch for a nap.

The closing lines of his poem, ***Thanatopsis***, go like this:

***“So live, that when thy summons comes
to join the innumerable caravan, which moves to
that mysterious realm, where each shall take His chamber
in the silent halls of death, thou go not,
like the quarry-slave at night, Scourged to his dungeon,
but, sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust,
approach thy grave like one who wraps the drapery
of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.”***

Easter morning is a reminder that Jesus, too, died.

His body took on the appearance of sleep.

They laid him in a tomb, on a slab of rock.

Who could sleep on something like that?

In fact, there was no mattress, no tomb, no grave,

with a sleep number so pleasant that could keep Jesus,

the Son of God, asleep forever.

“Vainly they watch his bed,” writes the hymnist —

who then provides the chorus: ***“Up from the grave he arose,
with a mighty triumph o’er his foes.”***

Clearly, the apostle has no doubts that Jesus Christ,

the same one who was crucified and buried,

has left sleep and death behind and is now our risen Lord.

“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead” (v. 20 NIV).

Yet, the larger point that Scripture makes here

concerns our own life and death. If Christ is our risen Lord,

then we can take this as our guarantee that we, too,

though we die, shall live. These were Jesus’ very words

to Martha while his good friend, Lazarus, still lay in the grave:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me,

even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives

and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

The body may take on the appearance of sleep,

resting as it will in the grave, but the soul will not die.

The apostle emphasizes this central tenet of our faith once again in his letter to the Thessalonians: ***“we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NIV).

When we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are celebrating many things. We celebrate his victory over sin. ***“[Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself”*** (Hebrews 9:26).

We celebrate his victory over Satan. ***“He himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death”*** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

We celebrate his victory over death.

“Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

(1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

We celebrate his role as our advocate at the throne of God:

“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father,

Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is

the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only

but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

We celebrate his presence in our lives.

The last words of the post-resurrection Jesus

as recorded by Matthew assure us of this presence:

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”

(Matthew 28:20).

But here's the deal: We are also celebrating for ourselves.

If he lives, so do we!

How great is that? There's no sleep number mattress

that can offer that kind of deal! He lives! We live! Forever.

And ever. And ever.

We may not live in these mortal bodies of dust
as long as Kamato Hongo.

But when the body takes on the appearance of sleep, we live!

The resurrected Christ is the guarantee
of our eternal future in the presence of God!

But here's a final question and thought.

It would appear that some of us — we're all guilty of this at times —
are going through our present lives as though we've found
our perfect sleep number. We're comfortable, dozing,
napping through life — through our vocations,
through our careers, through our marriages and relationships —
as though we cannot hear the resurrection call of Jesus Christ
to awake from our sleep.

If Christ has risen — and he has — then let us live as though we, too,
have been aroused from our slumber.

Let's get to work for the kingdom.

Let's offer ourselves as channels of blessings
through the power of the risen Christ.

Let's climb off the mattresses of comfort and convenience.

Let's throw off the bedsheets of apathy.

Let's cast off the robes of discouragement and despair.

Let us instead go forth into the morning of a new day —
of promise, of hope, of life, of service, of mission.

For that is the calling of the One
whose awakening from sleep we now celebrate.

And that Resurrection Sleep Number? It's 1520,

for **First Corinthians 15:20:**

"Christ has [indeed] been raised from the dead." Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia!