

"Mind Your Busyness"

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Luke 10:38-42 • 1 Kings 19:9-18

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For the past week the Buc Days carnival has been going on night and day across the street from us here with all sorts of rides spinning and whirling around. If you've been to a carnival you know that the point of most of the rides is to move you around really fast without actually going anywhere and the rides only stop long enough to let people on and off and then they do it all over again.

It kind of reminds me of life these days. Do any of you ever feel as I do that life seems like a carnival ride? To me it seems as though the days and weeks fly by with meetings and appointments, soccer and basketball games, and lots of driving. The only word to describe life in today's society is "busy."

That's the only way to describe the last couple of weeks for me. It seems as though I've been going from one meeting or activity to another, with multiple events on the same day. One day, however, I was able to go home for lunch and just relax for a few moments in the quiet. So I began to ask God to show me what I should preach about this week. Almost instantly I felt like His response was "busy!" And so I suspect that some of you have experienced "busyness" in your life at some time.

The problem is not the activities themselves that fill up our time. For the most part they are worthwhile things. We wouldn't call spending time with family or attending your child or grandchild's sporting event a bad thing. The problem is when we have so many *good* things in our life that they distract us from

the *best* thing - our relationship with Christ.

One way to tell if you are too busy is to ask yourself, "how well does the beginning of Psalm 23 describe my daily life?" It says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul."

Our Scripture reading this morning begins by telling us that the prophet Elijah has "come to a cave and lodged in it." The truth is that Elijah is hiding in the cave." In the previous chapters Elijah has not exactly been making friends. King Ahab was a downright evil king, in fact chapter 16 says that Ahab did more to anger God than any other king before him. What Ahab did was set up altars to the false god Baal so the people could worship this idol.

So after three years of drought the Lord sends Elijah to confront Ahab again. Elijah then challenges the prophets of Baal to a competition. They each build an altar, put wood on the altar and prepare a sacrifice. Each of them is to then call upon their God and the one who answers by lighting the fire is the real God. So the Baal prophets go first and nothing happens. Then it's Elijah's turn and he has them soak the wood in water. Lots and lots of water. Then he prays and the Lord sends fire that not only lights the wood but consumes it, along with the sacrifice and all of the standing water.

Needless to say this makes Queen Jezebel, who happens to like her Baal religion, very unhappy and so she wants Elijah dead. So he runs away, which is how he ends up in this cave.

Elijah's life has been very busy. In fact, Elijah has been busy doing God's work. Twice he says, "I have been very jealous for the Lord." But there's a problem. Elijah comes to the cave burned out, depressed, and angry at God.

Our reading from Luke 10 is a very familiar passage for many of us. Jesus comes to stay at the home of Mary and Martha. We're told in verse 40 that, "Martha was distracted with much serving." Here Jesus, God Himself, is sitting in her living room. There's a whole lot that needs to be done to get supper served and Mary is just sitting there listening to Jesus talk. Martha was very busy. And she's a little angry also.

Here's the thing: Busyness and hurrying is the great enemy of spiritual life in our time. We live in a society that values busyness. Crowded schedules are the proof to ourselves that we're important. So we fill up our time to be very busy, or at least appear busy. But when we're that busy we can no longer hear God speak to us.

Our reading tells us that God told Elijah to go stand at the entrance to the cave and then it says, "behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"

Spiritual retreats, like *Walk to Emmaus* or *Cursillo* can be

times of significant spiritual growth for people. Lots of people experience God speaking to them for the first time at one of these retreats. Now I don't want to discount the activities that take place at these retreats because they are important. But I think one of the primary reasons they are so effective is because the retreat is a time when overworked, overbooked, busy people just stop their busyness. Their lives are filled with whirlwinds and earthquakes and fires. Those are the things that seem really important to us at the time. But the Bible tells us that God is in the low whisper, the still small voice as the King James translates it.

Participants in spiritual retreats are finally able to hear God speaking to them because for a few days they get rid of all of those things in their life that prevent them from hearing. At that moment they discover a relationship with Jesus that they never knew before because they were too busy. John Ortberg puts it like this: "for many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it."

So how do we fight back against busyness and hurry so that we can develop that deeper relationship with Christ? Probably the most effective weapon against hurry sickness is prayer. Prayer doesn't lend itself to "to do" lists. Eugene Peterson reminds us that, "it takes time to develop a life of prayer...it isn't accomplished on the run. I can't be busy and pray at the same time." The time we spend in personal prayer is time that we aren't *doing* something and so it's time available for God to speak to us, so make sure there's plenty of time in your

prayer life for listening, not just talking to God. If your day is controlled by a day planner, Peterson suggests that you actually schedule that time, write it into your planner. Use secret code if you have to. When someone wants to add something to your schedule, you can simply say, "I'm already scheduled for that time."

Another way to fight busyness is to be available for a friend. Spend some time with someone else but spend that time listening instead of talking. When you are listening, your time is not your own. You can't hurry. Third, in order to fight against busyness some of you will have to learn the spiritual discipline of saying "no." It's easy for us to be busy being jealous for the Lord, distracted by much serving. Now I'm not saying you shouldn't be serving the Lord. Everyone should have a ministry, some area where you are serving God with your gifts and talents. I'm talking about prioritizing your time so that you are ministering in the most effective way. You will find, then, that the time you spend serving becomes life-giving instead of busyness.

Finally, maybe it's time to clear your calendar for a weekend and attend a spiritual retreat. As Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." All of us need some time to be still before the Lord, in green pastures, beside still waters so that He can restore our soul. Thomas Kelly said, "People nowadays take time far more seriously than eternity." Getting away from your busy life just might put eternity back into perspective, helping you to hear the low whisper of God amidst the earthquake and

wind and fire of life. Then you can choose the one thing that is necessary, the good portion which will not be taken away, a relationship with Jesus.

Amen