

“Our Busy Lives”  
June 2, 2024

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15  
Mark 1:16-20, 40-42

How do you get eight youth from this congregation in the same place at the same time?

No, this isn't a riddle with some funny answer.

It's the logistical problem that Robin and I faced several times since last fall as we led this year's confirmation classes.

The youth that were confirmed this morning are busy people. They have jobs. They are on sports teams. They dance. They play a variety of musical instruments. And that means that their employers depend on them. Their teammates depend on them. Other dancers depend on them. Other members of the band or orchestra depend on them.

And they come through.

And because they were also committed to being a part of this confirmation class, they rearranged work schedules, they worked around practice sessions, they showed up at classes dressed to dance. It was still a challenge to get all of them in the same place at the same time, but it did happen.

They are committed people.

They are busy people.

And in that sense, they are similar to everyone else in this congregation that just welcomed them into full membership.

Most board chairs in our church also often ask: “How do you get nine or twelve adults from this congregation in the same place at the same time?”

High school and college students, young adults and parents, mid and late career professionals: We're busy living our busy lives. So, too, those who have “retired”—what does that even mean anymore?

And here's the thing: Our flurry of activity is one of the joys of life. We get pleasure from doing a lot, accomplishing a lot, and being with other people. Faithful participation in the work and worship of this congregation is a part of that. Please understand this—a busy life can be a joyful life. It's part of the created order: Each atom, each galaxy—and all of us in between—are bodies in motion.

Looking at scripture, we might even be bold enough to say that in our busyness, we are imitating Jesus.

Since last October, the confirmands read through the Gospel of Mark. It is the shortest of the four Gospels. It is also a Gospel that moves at a very fast pace. Mark uses the word “immediately” over 25 times in just sixteen chapters. It was used three times in that short section from chapter 1 that we hear this morning. Reading this Gospel, one senses an urgent busyness. Not only Jesus, but those he calls to follow him—and even healing—seem as though they have no time to wait.

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is busy.

We see him teaching and healing. We watch as the people crowd around him. Then we listen as he says to those closest to him: “Let’s move on from here. I’ve got more to do elsewhere.”

People of faith confess that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Perhaps from our vantage point we can best understand the humanity of Jesus as we see his life, like our lives, caught up with the lives of friends and strangers in the hectic world around him.

In our busy lives we seem to be imitating Jesus.

But you know that there are times when the joy of a busy life can fade. My planning calendar is called a “Day Runner.” It has a graphic showing some harried little man racing through the week. What is so appealing about that?

There are times in all our busyness that we aren’t really awake or aware in our everyday lives.

We don’t have the time for one another. We don’t make the time to know our great joys, our deep fears, our high hopes, our real hurts.

We worry that we are going through these busy days unknown, unseen by the living God.

In our busy lives we continue to ask the question first put by Malcolm Boyd nearly sixty years ago: “Are you running with me, Jesus?”

Where, then, is the good news in this busy Gospel and in our busy lives?

It is hidden, almost unnoticed.

Several times in Mark, in the morning, while it is still dark, Jesus wakes up, goes to a deserted place, and prays. Look closely in the darkness. You will see someone in the very middle of life seeking out the One who is the Author of Life. You will see someone who prays knowing that to live the creature needs to be in contact with the Creator.

When we pray as we learn from Jesus, we are never removed from the rest of life with all its challenges and demands and opportunities.

The poet speaks of God as the still point of the turning world. If we are to know that still point in a world that spins with dizzying speed, it will be through prayer as we bring our anguished and honest and bold cries to God.

When we look at the picture of Jesus in the Gospels, we see not only a busy Jesus, but also someone who knew when and how to slow down.

And because he could slow down, he was also able to bring the healing and the power of God to others. The goal is neither speed and busyness nor slowness and rest—as important and necessary as those might be. The goal is something more like our engagement with other people and strengthening our bonds with them.

We slow down, not for the sake of slowing down, but so that we might give our attention to what matters. We need to learn to pause every now and then—otherwise nothing good will catch up with us.

And when it does, we change.

Over the years there have been youth in this church who were very accomplished in one area or another—say, music or sports—who at some point just stopped—not because they were burned out, exactly, but because they found something else that called for their attention, their commitment.

I once knew a flute player, a Julliard graduate, who became a computer programmer.

We change majors, we change careers.

Take pleasure, the ancient author of Ecclesiastes urges us. Take pleasure in all that keeps you busy.

Be busy, but in that busyness express who you are, what you value.

Be busy, and in that busyness keep watch always for your heart's desire—what it is, where you are finding it, and where you are missing it?

How do you get eight youth from this congregation in the same place at the same time?

I don't know.

I do know it isn't easy. They're busy. We are all busy.

Our looking for the answer does not end with confirmation. We will continue to find ways to bring eight or eighteen and more youth together in the coming year.

And we will do it by welcoming them, by celebrating with them, and by recognizing the joyful truth that we affirmed this morning: this is their congregation, place for their busy lives, a place for all our busy lives where we might find strength and be renewed and carry out the tasks God gives to us in our time.