

Sermon: Pacing In A Fast-Paced World

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11

Date: Sunday, January 21, 2018

Preacher for the Day: Rev. Becky Stephens Smithey

I want to give you all a picture of a “day in the life of Becky.” Every morning, I get up and get ready for the work day, get Olivia up and ready for school and then hop in the car for the “long” commute to Bucyrus Elementary School and then to my office at the Administrative Outreach Building. Usually, in trying to get Olivia to school on time, I’m driving maybe a skoosh over the speed limit. Inevitably, I get behind some law abider who is sticking with the 25 mph. This drives me nuts! So then, after spending the time I needed in the office, I may swing over to the Kroger or to the Walmart to pick up a few things before having to pick up Olivia at school. After picking up a few items, I head to the checkout, where I always look to see which line is the shortest with the fewest amount of groceries to ring up. But then, once I’ve picked a line and stand there waiting, I’m always watching the other lines to see if I would’ve gotten out faster if I had indeed gotten behind that man in the blue jacket. And, of course, I get pretty annoyed if I figure out that I ended up choosing the wrong line because time is of the essence, right?!? Our lives are so busy that not a moment can be wasted!

Do you feel this way? Do any of you constantly feel hurried and rushed? Does it seem like you’re always hustling from one thing to another and never quite have time to get everything done? For these next three weeks, we are going to consider our busy lives and take some time to reflect on God’s wisdom for keeping things balanced and for living the best lives possible.

How many of you keep a day planner? Or maybe a calendar hangs on the wall in your kitchen? And I’m betting a lot of you are like me, you keep your calendar on your computer or phone. My calendar stays pretty full. And how many times a day do we check our calendars or day planners? For those of us with lots of meetings or appointments or activities, we’re probably looking at the calendar several times a day, right? Our calendars are like the guide to our lives. If people want to find out a lot about us, they can just look at our calendars and have a pretty good idea of how we spend our time and what we value the most. In fact, we often come to a point where our lives are essentially ruled by our calendars. The clock becomes our “god,” and it always seems like there’s never enough time to get everything done, even when we are hurrying from one thing to another. And so with that in mind, we come to our first bit of guidance from God.

As hard as it sometimes is to believe, God desires good and wonderful things for us. It’s why he sent his son to the earth to teach us and guide us and even die for us, so that we can have life abundant in God’s presence. And it’s not that God wants us to have that great life only after we die, God desires that we would experience that even now. So way back, several thousand years ago, God delivered to his chosen people, the Israelites, the “Ten Commandments,” part of which we heard this morning. God’s intent in giving these commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai was that they should be received never as a burden, but always as a gift, an opportunity to grow deeper in relationship with God. We often reduce the Ten Commandments to a simple set of moral principles, but that’s not what God had in mind at all. The commandments come as a gift from God to his chosen people to structure their common life, and to shape individual lives that

are worthy of this God who has rescued them and with whom they are in covenant. They should not be read as divine finger-wagging or moral hand-slapping; these commandments are intended to mold our life with God in the best way possible. And the most distinctive of these commandments is the one we heard just a few moments ago related to Sabbath rest.

When God commanded the Israelites to “remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy,” it was the first time any religion had set aside a special “holy” day each week. Of all the religions that were part of the ancient world, none had a special set-aside day. But God wanted the lives of his people to be different, to be better, and God knew that in order for that to be possible, they would need rest. Indeed, God seems to know us better than we know ourselves. So God gives this Sabbath commandment, which is about honoring God’s rhythm for our lives, and rest is written into the very nature of things. In encountering God on the Sabbath, God’s people can hope to recover a right relationship with our God. Sabbath is about remembering who you are, resting, and being renewed as God’s people.

For God, this was so important that he didn’t just highly suggest it, he actually commands it; placing it right up there with the commandments against murder, and adultery, and using the Lord’s name in vain. And several hundred years after the commandments were given, as the Israelites were straying away from their God, Jeremiah the prophet came and he said to the people, “For the sake of your lives, remember the Sabbath.” For the sake of your lives! That’s how important this is, our very lives depend on it!

We know how true that is, don’t we? When we get too busy with work, our family life suffers—we fight or don’t communicate with our spouses, our children start acting out and possibly start falling behind in school, and our health declines. When we get too busy with errands and activities and life in general, our faith suffers, doesn’t it? We stop taking the time we need to reconnect with God, and we begin to have these nagging doubts and uncertainties when things are not going as planned. Yet how many of us put “Sabbath” on our calendars? How often do we mark “Bible Study” or “prayer” as an appointment, an obligation of our time? How many of us have “worship” written into our Sunday morning schedules? But we don’t, do we? Because we don’t have time.

You know, back in the 60s, we thought that technology would make life easier. There were these cartoons and shows like *The Jetsons* that pictured these idyllic lives made easy through the work of robots and transmitters and all these amazing technologies. Yet here we are in 2018 with these incredible advances in technology in the last 20 or 30 years, and our lives aren’t any less hurried. In fact, it seems like we have less time now than we did back in the 60s. A few years ago, *Newsweek* magazine published some pretty amazing statistics about technology in the last decade. Here’s what they revealed:

- In the year 2000, there were 100 million Google searches every day. In 2010, that number was 2 billion a day.
- In 2000, we sent 400 thousand text messages in a day. In 2010, that number was over 10,000 times that, 4.5 billion texts sent per day.
- Emails were one of the earliest great technological advances. In 2000, there were approximately 120 billion emails sent daily. In 2010, that number had more than doubled to 247 billion.

- And in the year 2000, we spent an average of 2.7 hours online each week. In 2010, the average weekly hours spent online were 18. I suspect it's even higher than that now. So where did those extra 15 hours a week come from?

We all know the answer to that question, even if we're not willing to admit it. Those hours have been taken away from our sleep, our work, our family, our God; and our lives suffer because of it. We miss the beauty of sunsets and wonderful conversations with friends. We miss the opportunity to pause and reflect on our experiences and through that to gain wisdom about our lives. We don't take time to celebrate accomplishments and victories and to savor the joys of life, because "we don't have time." But that's not really true, is it? We have time; the problem is how we chose to use our time. We know we shouldn't be living this way, but we're not doing anything to change it. And I suspect that the reason we're not trying too hard to change our lives is because we don't really have any good reason to make changes. Well, today we are reminded of a significant reason to make some changes; because over commitment is a sin. If murder, lying, coveting, and adultery are sins, then failing to rest, to honor the Sabbath, is a sin, too. God has a plan for us, and when we are ignoring that plan, we are sinning! Can you think of a more compelling reason to change some things in your life? When we look at this as a problem of faith, a problem of sin, then there is a different power to deal with, and the urgency to change is so much greater.

So what changes will you make? What changes can we all make that will create space for remembering, resting, and renewing? Certainly, what God commanded was a single day of rest each week. But what Jesus teaches his disciples is that Sabbath isn't just a weekly thing, but also a daily practice. It is part of our daily rhythm. In our reading from Mark this morning, Jesus has been busy teaching in his hometown synagogue, and he has just learned that his friend, John the Baptist has been beheaded; crowds are constantly following him and pressing in around him, and in the midst of it all, he looks to his disciples and says, "Let's go rest for a while." Jesus is teaching the disciples that they have to stop, rest, and renew. We all do!

Have any of you ever grown carrots in your garden? If you have, then you know that as the carrots begin to grow, they have to be thinned out. So, when the tops are about two inches high, you pull up some carrots, thinning them so that the remaining ones are about an inch apart. Then, three or four weeks after that, you thin the carrots again to three or four inches apart. You have to do this to the carrots because if you don't the roots will be crooked and all the carrots will be bad. So you have to thin out some of the good carrots so the other carrots will be even better.

This is something we have to do with our lives, too. Sometimes we have to take some things out so that our load is not so heavy; so that we can do other things better. And we have to be sure there is time and space for Sabbath, for the rest and renewal that will connect us to God and help us grow as his people.

For some reason we've gotten it into our heads that we have to do everything. The result is that we do a whole bunch of things badly, not least of which is neglecting our all-important, life-giving relationship with God. Worship, prayer, study, and time for reflection are an important part of remembering who we are so that we can connect with God and have renewal. But if we

do not make time for these practices, we are missing out on the wonderful, abundant life that God intends for us all.

So let's start today. I want you to take the scrap piece of paper at the end of the pews and pass them down so that everyone has one. I want to invite you to write down and release to God all of those burdens of your time which are keeping you from experiencing God's good life. We'll place those in these tubs and we'll watch over the next couple of weeks to see what God can do with our burdens. Let this be the beginning of renewal in your life as you commit to re-connect with God each and every day.

We cannot change the things of the past, we can't take that time back, but we can live differently in the future.