

Wondering and Wandering

August 12, 2018

Rev. Kelley L. Becker

*Title Slide

Have you ever needed to create something and been unable to do so? Maybe it was a project you were too overwhelmed to even begin. You know the ones...they involve poster board and glue sticks. Or maybe it was a paper about a book you didn't even like or maybe it's that chicken you thawed before work. Your family was expecting dinner and all you had was some raw chicken. Every once in a while, the thing I most fear materializes. I sit down to write a sermon and nothing happens. If I've learned one thing as I've adjusted to weekly sermon writing, it is that if the sermon is not ready to be written, it will not be written. It will not be confined by my schedule or preferences. And sometimes it is maddening!

I didn't learn this lesson as quickly as I would have liked. I've spent my fair share of time typing sentence fragments and deleting them, only to realize I haven't come close to constructing a meaningful point. Lately, I've come to realize that a change of scenery, a nap, or reading something easy and fun will often get the sermon headed in the right direction...or at least a direction. Staring at the blank computer screen is never helpful. I know this in my head, but I find myself getting sucked back into it when things don't come together when and how I had planned.

You see, I like to make a plan and stick to it. I like to write things on my calendar, map out goals and meet them. I love the days when all the things are checked off on my "to-do" list. I would bet many of you understand this way of going about life. Have you ever found yourself thinking or saying, "There aren't enough hours in the day"? Maybe we feel this way because the world tells us, "Your worth is in what you

produce.” And, sadly, we believe it. It’s a lie. We are worth so much more than what we are able to accomplish each day.

Listen to what one of the authors of Isaiah imagined God saying to the people of Israel:

“But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you...”

~Isaiah 43: 1,4

This message is for all of us. Because God created us, we belong to God, we have worth, and we are loved...before we *do* a single thing.

*Rabbi Abraham Heschel, may have been reflecting on this certainty when he wrote, “Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.”

In the Gospels, again and again, Jesus has the audacity to insist that every human being is worthwhile to God. The lost are found by a God who seeks all of us...not because of what we’ve done, but because of who we are; human beings, created by God, in the image of God.

And it is beautiful when we live this out. I can’t help but think about Sara Cunningham, the organizer of Free Mom Hugs who was with us a few weeks ago. Her message over and over is that God loves everyone and her call is to make that love real for our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ community. Even this week, she has offered her help to community in turmoil over how to welcome a trans student at the local school. Parents of students at the school are using social media to bully the trans student and family. In her letter to the school board, she wrote, “We, at Free Mom Hugs, believe in complete, affirming love of our LGBTQ children...now is the time to say, enough is enough.”

And some of us are trying to live out our faith in the overwhelming love of God for all people traveling to the southern border in September to bear witness to what is happening there and to learn what we can do to change the narrative about immigrants and refugees that many Christians have embraced. This narrative, which I consider the root of everything that is wrong in the world, is that some lives are worth more than others. This is why children are in cages and families are ripped apart. This is what's wrong with merit-based immigration. It is the exact opposite of the Bible's message of God's overwhelming love and deep concern for all people. And we, as Christians, should be the loudest voices, proclaiming that narrative.

We have to believe it first, though. That's what this sermon series is about, connecting with God in new ways so that we can more fully understand what God wants for this world and for us and so we can be ready to live into it. And I don't think that understanding is going to come from producing more. I think it might come in a surprising way.

*I think we need to waste more time.

As I wrote that, I thought I might get an "amen," from some of you and I also feared it would be the sound byte that someone would post on social media. So, before you post anything, hear me out.

*First, when you hear the phrase, "wasting time," what comes to mind?

The answers we gave to this question indicate that we have accepted the notion that if we are not producing something of "value," we are wasting time.

*We can quibble over the definition of "value", but the bottom line is our busy, productivity-driven world labels activities like day dreaming, doodling, watching the humming birds outside the window, and playing, wasted time. Some of us even feel guilty when we engage in

them. But, how can we encounter God's still, small voice if our lives are constantly packed with activity and productivity and expectation?

What if we began to see opportunities to let our minds wander and opportunities to veer from our carefully laid plan as spiritual practices, just like prayer and fasting? We don't feel bad for taking time to pray. And not one of us who fasted last Wednesday mentioned that we felt guilty for *not* eating all day. Yet, we gaze out the window, watching the leaves on the trees shimmer in the wind for a few minutes, and quickly jar ourselves back to work, noting this is not on today's list of things to do. In their book, *Spirituality for a Busy Generation*, Teri Peterson and Amy Fetterman discuss how many of us see ourselves as "very go-with-the-flow" kind of people. And some of us are. But some of us, when we say that, really mean we are, "go-with-the-flow-when-the-flow-looks-pretty-darn-close-to-my-plan" kind of people.

Like Sheldon, on the TV series, *The Big Bang Theory*, who is the exact opposite of go-with-the-flow.

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2hllvF5gJI>

Most of us manage changes in the plan better than Sheldon, but perhaps we still have something to learn about the importance of "going-with-the-flow" and how our ability to do so could positively affect our connection to God and other people.

I ran across this old story from Jewish tradition this week and it made me laugh.

An old Hassidic rabbi crosses the village square every morning on his way to the temple to pray. One morning, a large soldier, who happened to be in a vile mood, accosted him saying, "Hey, Rabbi, where are you going?" And the rabbi said, "I don't know."

This infuriated the soldier. "What do you mean, you don't know? Every morning for twenty-five years you have crossed the village square and gone to the temple to pray. Don't fool with me. Who are you, telling me you don't know?"

He grabbed the old rabbi by the coat and dragged him off to jail. Just as he was about to push him into the cell, the rabbi turned to him, saying, "You see, I didn't know."

And the truth is, we can't work, plan, or schedule our way into knowing. *Musician John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans." Our "best laid plans," late nights at the office, taking work home, spotless performance evaluations, and carefully planned vacation itineraries will not guarantee that which we desire will come to be. Of course, these things make us feel more confident or that we are in control, but that is an illusion. Just ask anyone who has suddenly lost their job, who sits wondering what the reorganization of the company will look like, or who has had their world turned upside-down due to weather delays at the airport. When we are obsessed with "covering all the bases," leaving nothing to chance, we don't leave room for God to do anything new in us and through us.

I'm not suggesting that we should all throw away our calendars, delete Google calendar from our smart phones, and call in sick to work tomorrow. I'm not saying we shouldn't work hard or do our very best in school. I'm suggesting that, the next time something unexpected happens, go with it. The next time a bird or tree blowing in the wind catches your eye outside your office window, spend a few minutes watching. The next time your child or grandchild tugs at you and says, "Play with me," do it, even though the dishes aren't done and the laundry is ready to be folded. Maybe consider a road trip to nowhere special or even to somewhere sacred. Think of the sparks of creativity and inspiration that can come from a few days on the road without a plan. It is possible to become a go-with-the-flow person, but it takes practice.

Peterson and Fetterman remind us, "...if we don't get off the hamster wheel for a moment, if we don't take the opportunity to get lost or go

on a pilgrimage or stare out the window and just see where the wind blows, we may find we've missed life, not just an opportunity. Noticing where your eyes wander, what your eyes rest on, or what your subconscious has to say are important ways of connecting to what the Spirit is doing in your life...bringing creativity, fresh hope, and deep connection, if only we will take a moment to listen."

These moments of unscheduled time to wonder and wander make our lives full and fun. They give us balance and boundaries. We simply were not wired to produce all the time. We've talked before about the importance of sabbath. The first creation story in Genesis tells us about God modeling a rhythm of life for us...creating for 6 days and resting the 7th.

*Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, urges the recipients to "pray without ceasing." I don't think he was suggesting spending 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on our knees in prayer. But, what if our prayers looked like taking time to be absolutely mesmerized by what God is doing in the world and in each of us? What if watching that hummingbird outside your window was an act of prayer? What if watching bubbles float away or clouds pass you by was a way of connecting with the Holy?

And maybe, doing these things, losing ourselves in daydreams and play, will bring us face to face with a part of God or a part of ourselves we haven't connected with before? Maybe, in our wasted time, we will find some of that joy that the 24-hour news cycle has sucked out of us. And what if we reflected that joy into this world? We've all been around Christians that make being a Christian look just plain miserable. Their lists of what isn't allowed and who isn't allowed are truly exhausting. God didn't create us for that. We were created for connection, with God and with one another. We were created for love. Being angry, miserable, hateful, tired, overworked, bitter people does not lend itself well to connection or to love. It seems to me, the real

waste of time is living like that. Let's do something different. Let's be something different.

As always, we will gather on Wednesday at 7pm to try out a new spiritual practice. You don't want to miss this week. I promise you, it will not be a waste of time. Amen.