

*Sitting Still ~ Still Sitting:
Under Her Wings*

Text:

Luke 13:31-35

A sermon preached by
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February 21, 2016
Lent 2



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Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus], “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”



“Today, tomorrow, and the next day. I must be on my way.” Hardly leaves time for sitting and thinking or focusing, meditating or praying. Jesus seems as busy as any of us with our over-scheduled Google calendars and with the nanosecond blips of information that are constantly at our fingertips and filling our heads.

I am one of those information junkies that needs to know something about everything. I used to think it was a gift, knowing the trivia that made me fun to be with if you’re playing Quizzo or Trivial Pursuit. “Significant trivia,” I call this skill set that I was so proud of.

“Does anyone know why it’s called a turnpike?,” asked Professor Rebovich in my Urban Politics class in college.

My hand bolted upright. (We hate those know-it-alls, right?)

“It’s because the road would be blocked at a toll booth with a wooden arm that was balanced on a pike driven into the ground.

To get through, you paid your money and the toll taker would ‘turn the pike’ and let you through.”

“How did you know that?!?!”

I shrugged with a smile.

But these days, I can’t keep up. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Google, Yahoo, Bing. Email, text messages, phone in my pocket. Unlimited television channels, 24/7 news cycles. News at my fingertips, it seems, before it even happens.

A question comes up, I stop whatever I’m doing, pop open Google, type in “why do frogs spit” and, viola, I have the answer. It seems that some frogs spit a venom as protection from attackers. Now you know.

But for someone like me, a significant trivia-er, the proliferation of methods for gathering this stuff into my tiny brain is devastating. I am constantly distracted by the need to know. Not that there really is a need to know, but I really do *need to know*.

I wonder why I need to know. Excuse me a second while I look that up ...

Hey, wait a minute!

Today, tomorrow, and the next day. I must be on my way. Hardly leaves time for sitting and thinking or focusing, meditating or praying. Texting, posting, Googling. Hardly leaves time for sitting and thinking or focusing, meditating or praying. It’s wearing me down. I need to sit.

“How often have I desired to gather you ... together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”, says Jesus. Like the brooding Spirit of the creation story in Genesis, God like a mother hen pulls us under her wings, into her warmth and security, and gives us a moment to be still and to sit

under her protective care. Finally, we can slow down and be cared for.

Jesus' prayer here is for Jerusalem, the city that never sleeps, the city that finds a way to get rid of any prophet that dare challenge the status quo or suggest that God has an alternative way for us to live and let live, to love and let love. Beloved Jerusalem had become a nest for that brood of vipers that would harm Jesus if they could just get him to sit still for a moment.

Yet a few Pharisees, it would seem, might really care about Jesus' safety. "Get out of town," they tell him, "because Herod is out for blood and you are in grave danger if you stay in Jerusalem." But Jesus isn't too worried. "He knows where I'll be if he wants to find me. I can't just run away. I need to stay put here in Jerusalem for a bit yet because those who need my message the most are here."

We need to hear that when we want to cut and run. Sometimes it feels like the best way out of a challenging predicament is to avoid it by simply running away from it. But that doesn't really solve anything, it just puts distance between you and the issue, between you and those others who are behind the challenge that you are facing. Don't run away, says Jesus, stay, sit awhile, and face the reality of what is in front of you. But that requires vulnerability on our part, and vulnerability is what we are avoiding by keeping ourselves busy day after day after day. If I run, figures Jesus, I am just avoiding what I am convinced God wants of me, that I stay connected in relationship with the people around me. And that is not easy and it requires courage.

What the very existence of Jesus reminds us is that God has become vulnerable to what human life has to offer by becoming one of God's children. God-with-us stands in the middle of a Jerusalem which threatens, doesn't run away, and remains vulnerable to those around him because he knows they need him. The courage that accompanies that willingness to stay reminds us that knowing that God holds us under her wings allows us to *do things for those we love that we simply would not or could not do for ourselves.*

Jesus pushes forward to Jerusalem not to prove himself a hero or martyr, not to make a sacrifice for sin to a judgmental God, not even to combat death and the fear that accompanies it. Rather, Jesus sets his sight on Jerusalem and embraces the sure death that awaits him there out of profound love for the people around him, a mother's fierce love that will stop at nothing to protect her children.

Storyteller and teacher Brene Brown is one of today's voices willing to talk and teach the importance of vulnerability. (We'll be viewing a brief video of her this week as the focus of our Tuesday evening Lenten Study, "Sitting in the Dark.") Brene Brown invites us to recognize that while vulnerability inevitably opens us up to feeling things we might want to avoid, it also spurs us to be more authentically and fully human and more caring, compassionate, and courageous than we could otherwise be. Brown reminds us that courage comes from the Latin *cor* – "heart" – and she defines courage as living from the heart. To be more fully authentic, we must be willing to embrace our vulnerability and live out our lives from deep within our hearts.

Jesus' willingness to stay vulnerable in the face of real danger gives us an example of the kind of whole-hearted living that comes from knowing that simply being a child of God is enough. All that extraneous clutter in our lives – my significant trivia, if you will – is simply unnecessary. And acknowledging that everyone around me is also a child of God demands that they deserve my love, empathy, and respect.

What if in this passage we see Jesus not merely acting courageously but embracing who he was called to be for the sake of those he loved, and thereby inviting us to be who we are called to be for the sake of those around us? What would our community and this church look like if we decided together to live wholeheartedly, making room to name our fears and doubts and together work through them openly and honestly.

Or we can just keep living in constant motion swirling from one calendar moment to the next with little understanding of what is around us – missing out on the relationships that just might sustain us better than the phone in our hand and the Internet at our beck and call.

This reality came to a peak for me over these past few weeks. Last Sunday I spoke with you about how valuable just sitting has been for me as my mom was nearing her life’s end. Sitting still with her; still sitting with her as we shared time together. I won’t talk about mom all of this Lenten series but bear with me for one more revelation that I received.

I suddenly realized that as soon as I got to mom’s room, I would hang up my coat in her closet, and I would dig into the inside pocket for my phone. I would tuck it in my pants or shirt pocket and sit down to talk with mom. Inevitably, though, what did I do? I would take it out and check Facebook – because watching a cute cat video was more important than sitting with mom? I would answer texts from my kids and nieces and nephews and from Lydia – “mom’s not having a good day today” or “progress in PT, she pushed her own wheelchair a few feet.”

Or I would stare with mom at the mindlessness on the TV – background noise to scare away the fear or the unspoken, a video fence to keep vulnerability at bay.

Why? Why was I looking at my phone, Googling useless information, letting the TV drown out the reality around me?

Mom loved to crochet. She always had a project going. She could make an afghan in what seemed like no time. There was a favorite of mine growing up – multi colored chevrons, big enough to really cover you up as you lay on the sofa. I often thought, I wish mom had that here with her at Wesley. Even if it didn’t make her feel better, it would give me comfort seeing her wrapped in it.

My cousin had brought her a fleece blanket when he came to visit just after Christmas and that stayed on her bed until the very end.

And that was a great security to her and to me. But that afghan. Where was it?

It wasn't until after her death and we were looking through photos that I found it – folded neatly across the back of my brother's living room sofa, a place where mom loved to spend time. Even just seeing it in the photo filled my heart with warmth and security – and knowing that my brother has it to wrap his family in gives me great hope.

And as I thought about our *Sitting Still* sermon theme for this season, it also brought to mind the rocking chair that I will be getting from mom's house. Chairs, actually. It seems over the years I bought mom 2 rockers – one for Mother's Day many years ago for inside by the fireplace, another for Mother's Day about 5 years ago, a white porch rocker for her deck where she loved to sit.

So we add a rocker this morning – not mom's but on loan from The Stangos. And we add an afghan – not mom's but one from our Prayer Shawl ministry which we offer as comfort to those who might need it for comfort during difficult times.



[Pastor sits in rocker having wrapped Prayer Shawl over his shoulders.]

Oh, how God longs to wrap each one of us under her wings and pull us into her security as we face the vulnerabilities of our lives. It gives me inward peace to know that I can be safe in deepening my relationships if I let Jesus' prayer for Jerusalem be also God's prayer for me.

“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood

under her wings”

Let us sit together wrapped in God's wings.

Amen.