

A Sacred Rhythm of Work and Rest

Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 6:30-32.

Rev. Robert L. Hunter

John Knox Presbyterian Church

April 28, 2013

Recently I ran across an article posing a question that caught my attention. The title was: Would Jesus Have Carried an I-Phone? Several waves of thought ran through my mind:

- It's a pretty ridiculous question...
- But, maybe not SO ridiculous... Of course Jesus was efficient... wasn't he?
- Well, if Jesus could have "friended" thousands of people on Facebook or Tweeted them on Twitter, wouldn't he have used every means available to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom of God??
- I don't know... Certainly, whatever means might exist to touch the lives of all kinds of people he would not have forsaken or rejected... UNLESS the means used might in some way undermine the heart of the message he came to bring.
- So, **that set me wondering what particular aspects of our contemporary culture and technology might – in one way or another – tend to undermine or even contradict the message Jesus came to announce and embody?**

Robert Sapolsky is a distinguished neuroscientist at Stanford University. In a book entitled, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, he describes the critically important link between the amount of stress we absorb in our hurried lives and our physical health. He writes:

"The diseases that plague us now are ones of slow accumulation of damage—heart disease, cancer, cerebrovascular disorders. ... We have come to recognize the vastly complex intertwining of our biology and our emotions, the endless ways in which our personalities, feelings, and thoughts both reflect and influence the events in our bodies. ... Put in the parlance with which we have grown familiar, stress can make us sick, and a critical shift in medicine has been the recognition that many of the damaging diseases of slow accumulation can either be caused or made far worse by stress." (pp. 2,3)

We need to take seriously the various means available to us to reduce the pace and pressure under which we live our lives.

I've also recently run across a little book entitled "*Three Mile an Hour God*" by a Japanese Christian writer named Kosuke Koyama. Though he wrote more than 30 years ago, his words ring with relevance to our 21st Century dilemma:

"We live today an efficient and speedy life. We are surrounded by electric switches, some of which cost us 10 dollars and others may even cost \$2,000. We want more switches. Who among us dislikes efficiency and a smooth-going comfortable life? University students use the Xerox machine in their studies. Housewives use 'instant pizza' for supper. Men's legs are fast deteriorating from the lack of the most basic

human exercise, walking. Automobiles speeding at 50 miles an hour have replaced their legs. We believe in efficiency. Let's not just look at this negatively. There is a great value in efficiency and speed.

"BUT [he continues] let me make one observation. I find that God goes 'slowly in his educational process of man. 'Forty years in the wilderness' points to his basic educational philosophy. Forty years of national migration through the wilderness, three generations of the united monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon), 19 kings of Israel (up to 722 B.C.) and twenty kings of Judah (up to 587 B.C.), the hosts of the prophets and priests, the experience of exile and restoration – isn't this rather a slow and costly way for God to let his people know the covenant relationship between God and man?

Then he adds this "punch line":

"Jesus Christ came. He walked towards the 'full stop'. He lost his mobility. He was nailed down! He is not even at three miles an hour as we walk. He is not moving. 'Full stop'! What can be slower than 'full stop' – 'nailed down'? At this point of 'full stop', the apostolic church proclaims that the love of God to man is ultimately and fully revealed. God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is the lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love. It goes on in the depths of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk, and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks."

When we acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the One Sent from God, we affirm that in this Jesus of Nazareth, both the **power of God AND the PACE of God are revealed!**

["Oh, really?? Don't we have to take into account the fact that he lived at a time – and in a location – where everyone and everything moved much more slowly?! Didn't Jesus do the best he could to hurry from one place to another to touch as many people as he could during his all-too-brief three years of earthly ministry?"]

Well, in a word, **NO!** Throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, we have a body of teaching – representing faithful efforts to recall all of the distilled essence of his public and private teaching – all of which may be read aloud within a few hours! No, Jesus was not in a hurry. Yes, He was a man on a mission. Yes, he drew a crowd wherever He went. Yes, he paid careful attention to the brokenness of the people he encountered, and he reached out to heal them. He stopped to teach them. **But, he was NEVER in a HURRY!**

There has been much ado in recent years about whether the Ten Commandments should be on display in our public squares and courts of law. Though there may be many different motives for this, what concerns me more than the symbolism of having them on display is the question of whether these commands are part of our practice, from week to week, year in and year out.

For example: we might examine our way of life in light of **the Fourth Commandment**. From Exodus chapter 20, verses 8-11, it reads: **“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son, your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.”**

As Lisa shared last week: When God consecrates something, God takes something ORDINARY and sets it aside for an EXTRAORDINARY purpose!

(Gordon McDonald – after attending a Red Sox game at Fenway Park in Boston☺)

“I came to cheer one night in a baseball park, the banks of arc lights turning the sky’s darkness into artificial day.

“In that stadium filled to SRO, I watched the greatest names in baseball pitch, hit, and catch a simple, small round ball, and a crowd of thousands and thousands, writhing in enthusiasm, absorbed in expectancy, burst with frenzied feeling at the slightest motion of any famed athlete. So tense was the drama that it seemed for a moment as if there was no further perimeter to the real world except the top row of bleachers where the cold beer flowed like a small river, and smoke rose like incense in a pagan temple. To hear the prejudice of the crowd it seemed as if the greatest beings in history stood in the batter’s box or on the pitcher’s mound. ... It seemed as if no other event in the years of humankind came near to the significance of this exchange between a man on the mound and another with the bat.

“But as I sat, faintly tempted to abandon myself to this twisted view of reality, I caught from the corner of my eye, just beyond the glare of the left field lights, a tiny twinkling star. It’s small sparkle, its remote position, made it seem as if it had nothing to do with or to say about the pandemonium within that athletic temple. But I strained to listen... and suddenly heard what apparently no one else could hear:

“The star, a still small voice whispered, had been there in the sky longer and longer than the oldest stadium. It had burned light years before the game of baseball had been perceived, and it would burn long after Mighty Casey would strike out, even retire, with pension, to oblivion. And it would point to the God whose moves in time and space are far greater than the foolish efforts of a fearsome slugger about whom thousands scream tonight.

“Why do we choose to see and hear the trivial efforts of something just a game, yet miss the chance to stand in awe of a star twinkling just beyond the arc lights, whose magnitude is ten times greater than our Sun? Why do we reverse the scale of events, making the shorter the longer, the bigger the smaller, the insignificant the more prominent? It is a mystery. But until it is solved, the tiny quiet star will go on sparkling, just beyond the arc lights, telling anyone who will stop to listen that GOD IS THERE, and that the times of history are in His hands.”

Prayer: Slow Me Down Lord !

Slow me down, Lord!
Ease the pounding of my heart
By the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace
With a vision of the eternal reach of time

Give me, amid the confusion of my day,
The calmness of the everlasting hills.

Break the tension of my nerves
With the soothing music of the singing streams
That live in my memory.

Teach me the art of taking minute vacations,
Of slowing down to look at a flower,
To chat with a friend, to pat a dog,
To read a few lines from the Good Book.

Remind me each day of the fable
Of the hare and the tortoise
That I may know that the race is not always to the swift;
That there is more to life than measuring its speed.

Slow me down, Lord !
Inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil
Of life's enduring values.

Orin L. Grain