

“It’s Busyness As Usual”

Hebrews 4:6-16

Sermon Series: Unlimited Access 2. Hope Brings Peace

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You’ve heard of Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter. But apparently, to keep up with the culture, some churches are adding a new day to the Liturgical Calendar – Today is Star Wars Day. Why is the 4th of May Star Wars Day? Because today you can say, “May the Fourth Be with You.”

Recently I went down to Florida to lead a workshop of Presbyterians. Some of you thought I was taking a vacation but let me tell you I was busy – busy making the galaxy safe for Presbyterians.

All of us are busy. Even those who are retired say to me, “I’m busier now than when I worked.” A USA Today surveyed Americans and found that

- 68% Need more fun.
- 67% Need a long vacation.
- 66% Often feel stressed.
- 60% Feel time is crunched.
- 51% Want less work, more play.
- 49% Feel pressured to succeed.
- 48% Feel overwhelmed.¹

We complain, lament and even whine about our busyness. Some of it is unavoidable. But there are times when we also brag about our busyness. Michael Carroll, a lawyer here in Philadelphia, writes,

I really am tired of people flaunting the busy badge of honor. Look, I get too busy; you get too busy; most of us are too busy too much of the time. But do they have to brag about it? To me, it’s like being proud of not seeing your kids or your friends or not having a life outside your job. Some bragging rights. Too many Americans, now pride themselves on being busy. They worship busy. We are usually blind to what being too busy steals from us. Even if you are doing great things for the world, you need a life. There are people you need to spend time with. You may need to search for them if you have been too busy too long.²

Why would anyone brag about being too busy? Busyness signifies value, worth and importance in our culture. Yet like most boasts and brags, it covers an emptiness within. Chuck Swindoll says busyness “substitutes shallow frenzy for deep friendship. It feeds the ego but starves the inner man. It fills a calendar but fractures a family.”

¹ Lori Joseph and Bob Laird, "Americans Working Too Hard," *USA Today* Snapshots; source: Hilton Generational Time Survey of 1,220 adults in January 2001.

² Michael Carroll, "All Work and No Play," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 25, 1997, p. A13.

Technology was supposed to free us from all this busy work. In 1970 we were the only family around that had a computer in our home. It was three, floor to ceiling, machines that took up a corner of our basement. It had a Teletype instead of a video monitor and paper tape instead of disks. It was a *whiz* at addition. Multiplication took a little longer. My Dad worked on it all the time. They said that one day computers would make our lives so much easier and give us more leisure time. Fifty-five years later, the computer you hold in your hand is an interactive, multitasking, wireless wonder that is a thousand times faster than our old workhorse. But where's all the free time? It's not the computer's fault. Whatever time technology freed up, we filled up with more tasks. The American Management Association found that, through the miracle of multitasking, you can now squeeze 31 hours of activity into a 24-hour day.³ Whoopee! We are so multitasking and interactive we no longer have time to interact with God, ourselves and the most important people in our lives.

So how do you stay calm in a dot-com world? God offers us a simple gift: rest. The book of Hebrews reminds us,

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. Hebrews 4:9-11

The word Sabbath originally meant to be separate, to step away from work and the world for a bit. Even God the Master Worker took a rest when creation was finished. One day, when Jesus returns to rule on earth as He does now in heaven, there will be an eternal Sabbath-rest for the people of God. But in the meantime, between the beginning and the end of the world, the Lord offers us frequent gifts of rest, small tastes of heaven on earth.

Rest, in God's dictionary, is not just a nap, vacation, retirement or down time in front of the tube. It's far more rejuvenating. It does involve a break from our work. But for some of us, taking a rest will be harder, at first, than work. Did you notice the preacher of Hebrews challenges us to, "Make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:11)? It takes effort to rest. Here's God's formula for rest.

First, let Him ***Refresh*** you. The preacher of Hebrews repeats a passage from Psalm 95 three times in less than twenty verses. When a preacher does that, you know she or he is trying to make a point. The verse is: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps 95:7-8). We don't hear God's voice, we don't receive His rest because over the years our hearts have developed a crust, a coating, maybe even a callus. Like a hard piece of bread, we can get stale. We need God to re-fresh us, to soften the exterior, to even break open our heart if necessary.

But it must be done "Today." Sabbath rest is not something that happens tomorrow, next week or when you get around to it. I listen to many people who are haunted by the ghosts of yesterday or who are churned up about the anxieties of tomorrow. They live under a cloud of regrets, grudges and might have beens from the

³ Houston Chronicle (6-21-06).

past. Or they think the good stuff is always off in the future. Either way, they miss the joys of today. God gives you “Today” (Hebrews 4:7). That’s all you have. It’s all you ever will have. It’s okay to plan for tomorrow. There’s nothing wrong with remembering the past. Just don’t try to live at either of those two addresses. That makes your heart hard. Margaret Storm Jameson said, “The only way to live is to accept each minute as an unrepeatable miracle. Now is the time of your life.” Let Him refresh your heart. Take time Today, every Today, to open your heart and hear His voice.

But how do you hear His voice? You must let God *Refine* you. A hardened heart needs surgery. The disappointments and desires, the resentments and regrets, the worries and fears, the guilt and shame must be surgically removed by the Great Physician. The scalpel Jesus uses the sharpest instrument of all: the Word of God.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

The Scriptures are not a dead document, but a living, powerful, double-edged blade that slits the invisible division between joint and marrow, soul and spirit. It penetrates into places no medical doctor can reach to bring cleansing and healing. You don’t merely read Scripture, it reads you. When you study the Bible, it studies and examines you. It exposes the thoughts and attitudes in your heart.

Hebrews says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). At first glance, that’s a scary thought. You can’t hide anything from God. You can’t get away with anything. That should make us tremble a bit since God will be the one who judges us. Yet the Good News is that when all our thoughts and attitudes are laid bare before God, He can start to heal them. The healing comes when we listen for His voice in Scripture and look at our problems through His eyes. Don’t let your Bible sit like a trophy on the shelf. Use it every day. It’s a sharp, double-edged scalpel. Let God do some heart surgery on you each day. Let Him daily cut away the infections, the diseases, the growths in your soul and spirit. Let Him refine you daily like a sculptor who, by chipping, sanding and polishing, can create a living masterpiece from the hardest granite.

Leonardo Da Vinci, who excelled as a painter, poet, architect, engineer, city planner, scientist, inventor, anatomist, and philosopher once gave the following advice.

Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer, since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgment. Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller, and more of it can be taken in at a glance, and lack of harmony or proportion is more readily seen.

Step back, look at your life through God’s eyes. Listen to His voice. Let Him refine you.

The other way to hear God's voice is in prayer. When we rest in His presence He *Refuels* us. The preacher of Hebrews proclaims,

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:14-15

The high priest was the only person who stood between God and His people. Jesus, who is both fully God and fully human, has a foot firmly on both sides and is the only one who can reconcile us to God by His cross. When we lay bare the thoughts, attitudes and weaknesses in our hearts before God, we find not a harsh Judge but an understanding Savior and Friend. Why? He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses since He was tempted in every way just as we are – yet did not sin.

I spoke with a woman who twice went through the pain of losing a husband. When her first husband died she had the wisdom and courage to step out of the isolation of grief and seek help in a grief support group. It was a tremendous blessing, she said, because the leader of the gathering lost her husband. She understood. When my friend's second husband died she again found a support group. But this time the leader had never lost anyone that close. My friend replied it just wasn't much help because the group leader didn't understand her pain.

Jesus understands. He experienced our weaknesses. But even more, He's the only one who took all our weaknesses upon Himself. His Cross opened the door for us into the throne room of heaven. Hebrews says,

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy (forgiveness) and find grace (acceptance) to help us in our time of need Hebrews 4:16

Go to the throne of God in prayer every day. Don't bring your badge of busyness, your list of achievements, your proof of importance. Instead, bring your weaknesses, your pain, your emptiness and let Him fill you. Let Him refuel you with His mercy and grace, His forgiveness, healing, acceptance and peace. Do it "Today" – every "Today."

Today I'd like to give you an experience of rest in God's presence. By meditating on a familiar passage of Scripture, you will receive God's peace and rest. As I take a word away, reflect on how God speaks to you through His Word:

Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10)

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

Amen.