

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Luke, the people of God are walking a dangerous road, but they are not paying attention. Jesus stands before them, arms wide open...like he stands before Herod....and tells them the truth about themselves. God has stood before them many times before but, just like this time, they would rather not hear and they are not paying attention. Not paying attention. Really...is there anything new under the sun?

Is our world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century any different? What can we say about it...like Jesus, telling the truth about it. Well, for starters, we like to try to live at warp speed. We call it multi-tasking, and we celebrate it. Distracted living might be a better description. For example, we eat and watch television, instead of one or the other. We drive and talk on the phone, even though it is illegal. We go to class and we text message...so much so, that the schools are cracking down on cell phone usage during class...finally. And, we go to church, but also write a grocery list in our head, or ponder our golf handicap, or whatever.

Multi-tasking makes for shallow living. We can do a lot at the same time, but none of it goes very deep...and there is a cost. Albert Schweitzer once said that "your soul suffers if you live superficially." Moments of grace, epiphany, insight, are lost to us because we are in such a hurry. Jesus Christ, savior of the world, savior of our life, the peace that we pray for, can stand right in front of us and we will never even notice. Like those puzzles where you try to find 10 animals in the picture. They are all there, you are looking right at them, nothing more is needed to see them except...to see.

Joan Chittister, a noted Christian contemplative, tells this story about paying attention: "Where shall I look for Enlightenment?" the disciple asked. "Here," the elder said. "When will it happen?" the disciple asked. "It is happening right now," the elder answered. "Then why don't I experience it?" the disciple persisted. "Because you do not look," the elder said. "But what should I look for?" the disciple continued. "Nothing. Just look," the elder said. "But at what?" the disciple asked again. "At anything your eyes alight upon," the elder answered. "Must I look in a special kind of way?" the disciple said. "No. The ordinary way will do," the elder said. "But do not I always look the ordinary way?" the disciple said. "No, you do not," the elder said. "But why not?" the disciple asked. "Because to look you must be here. You are mostly somewhere else."

But in this story from Luke's gospel, we seek the deliberateness of Jesus. He is measured. Focused. On task. And at the opening of our text for today, we hear from Luke that "At that very hour some Pharisees came. Seemingly in a rush. Filled with disturbance. The odd thing is that, on this one

occasion, the Pharisees seem to be wanting to help Jesus, not oppose him. They say to him...at that very hour, remember...“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And Jesus, in response, basically says to them, “Tell that fox Herod to mind his own business. That is what I am doing, and I will do what I have to do when I am good and ready and there is nothing he can do about it.” Of course, he did not say it exactly that way, but my paraphrase gets the message across.

Jesus marched to his own beat, kept his own time, and when he thought the occasion called for it was willing to talk trash even with Herod. His time will come, of course...at the point in Luke’s gospel when Jesus “sets his face to go to Jerusalem,” the Holy City that kills its prophets. He knows what will happen there, and will eventually bringing things to a head.

It is interesting that he uses the image of a hen, instead of...let’s say..a rooster. A fox is the natural enemy of both rooster and hen. But while a rooster will defend his territory and protect his brood to the bitter end with all the ferocity he can muster, a hen encounters the fox differently. A hen will cower down, spread out her wings and protect her young as best she can, but sit vulnerably while the fox attacks. A hen, in other words, will give up her own life to protect her brood.

Jesus, as the hen to the fox of Herod, for the time being has more to do and does not head straight for Jerusalem. He circles around, teaching here, teaching there, healing folk, casting out demons, conducting his ministry. What is the rush? What is the rush for Jesus, and why be distracted?

What is our rush?

Hopefully like you, I want to experience deeply the spirit of God. I want my life to count. I do not want to get to the end of this earthly journey, taking my last breath, and find out I was too busy or bored or distracted to hear God's still, small voice. I do not want to be too pre-occupied to "wait here and watch with me," as Jesus asks. At this point in life, there is too much of real value to do. Too much of the holy around each of us to ignore. Too much yet for me to discern in the study of God’s word, in the reflection of God’s presence in the world around me. And there is too much conversation with God through a life of prayer that is still left unspoken...too much yet that God wants to self reveal to me. Like Jesus, all in good time...and Lent is a great time to remind us to back up, and take that time.

In preparation for today’s message, I read about one preacher’s experience in Guatemala. At one point, in a small village containing an orphanage where he worked, there was a little church of God.

To a good American Protestant, he wrote, the pastors in Guatemala seemed undereducated, the theology simplistic, the ritual impoverished. But instead of the gilded altars and towering domes of the colonial churches, these little churches were filled with people. People praying and praising and believing that God was active in their daily lives. They had started a day care and after-school program,

fed children nutritious meals, and trained mothers how to better raise their children. Fathers had turned away from drink, stopped beating their wives and children, started working multiple jobs and began to build good solid homes, one cement block at a time, proud of their new stoves with chimneys. He wrote that was easy for him to raise an eyebrow at their theology or question the enthusiasm of some of the evangelical missionaries. But these people were working to help and to heal and to save. Lives were being changed, people healed, demons cast out...the work of Jesus in the world today.

What is the message for our church?

Sure, we can study and learn. We can worship and praise God. We can invite people to church. And while all of that is essential to the raising of the people of God right here, we need to pay attention to the temptation to be satisfied with our own inclusive focus. Containing God within these walls.

Jesus tells us that, in addition, there is plenty of God's work to do here in our community. We can lend an ear to listen to our neighbor and find out what they need, how they can be helped, if we do not really know or recognize those needs ourselves. And, even if we think that we DO know those needs, it is even THEN more important to ask our neighbors. Our sign outside should read, "What can this church of God do for you?" Then, we can volunteer and help, listen even closer, care about others and then....name the reason as our faith in Jesus Christ. If you really want this church to grow.

Of course, all that means that we have to pay attention. Drop the distractions. Quit the distinctions. Prune away the busyness. And instead, take care of our spiritual health...by turning inward for the exercise of the soul and the strengthening of our relationship with God, so we can turn outward into the world around us. As Jesus did....continuing in his work, maintaining it within his own good time.

Lord, may we go with you to the place of sacrifice where you took all the world under your wing...and there may we find redemption and love, in the company of the loving God revealed to us in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.