

Haslett Community Church-United Church of Christ  
Second Sunday after Pentecost- May 25, 2008

Scripture lessons: Psalm 63:1-5 & Matthew 9:9-13, 18-34

GOING WITH GOD

One of the best and best-known American philosophers and psychologists, William James, once wrote that to a newborn baby the world is a “blooming, buzzing confusion”. His point was that as infants we’re bombarded with so many new and different sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures that we don’t know what make of at first. We need a long time of close supervision and care from others before we can start to make sense from the confusion and begin to live more and more “on our own”.

Ironically, as we get older and begin to live more “on our own” the world can again seem like a “blooming, buzzing confusion”. With adult responsibility for ourselves and increasing responsibility for others it can seem once more like there’s just “too much going on”- too much to figure out, too much to cope with, too much to take care of “on our own”. How can we deal with that, given that the close supervision and care we used to receive from others is no longer part of our life?

Well, we can make good schedules. Through solid plans, procedures, and routines maybe we can provide for ourselves the necessary supervision and care that others used to give. In that case, we make sure to keep interruptions and distractions to a minimum. Otherwise, through loss of focus we can again flounder in “blooming, buzzing confusion”. We carefully identify, categorize, and prioritize our tasks. We schedule them firmly. Our Day-Timers or PDAs become one of our most important possessions.

There’s no doubt that we get real help and comfort from carefully crafted routines and plans, but they also have a big downside. They’re prone to shut us off from the wonder and mystery of the world, wonder-full mystery that we too often fear because of the confusion it can sometimes bring. You might remember an old Supertramp hit from the late 1970s, entitled “The Logical Song”. It started out like this:

“When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful, a miracle. Oh, it was beautiful, magical. And all the birds in the trees . . . they’d be singing so happily, joyfully, playfully watching me. But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible, logical, responsible, practical . . . (to show me) a world where I could be so dependable, clinical, intellectual, cynical.”

The problem with all that, according to Supertramp, is that in the midst of so much sensible, logical, clinical, and responsible practicality we forget who we really are. Over and over the song pleads, “Please tell me who I am.”

Who am I? Who are you? Are we the sum total of our finely honed schedules that we so responsibly keep? Are we servants to the clock that has us running around from here to there day after day, but without any real sense of what we’re doing and why? When we finally hit the pause button after running in fast-forward all day, don’t we need to ask, “Who are we, really?”

In our second Scripture reading for today, Jesus is certainly running in fast-forward. In the verses that come just before our passage, we learn that he’s gone to his hometown of Nazareth. Soon, he has the whole place buzzing. First, he heals a paralytic man and forgives his sins. Some people think that the forgiveness part is blasphemous. Then he calls a tax collector, Matthew, to be one of his disciples and eats with Matthew and other tax collectors at Matthew’s house. People question how Jesus dares to hang out with such scum. Then some of John’s disciples come and ask Jesus why he and his disciples don’t fast. People have questions, questions, and more questions for Jesus, all designed it seems to see if he’s got the schedule of his beliefs all packed and in good order.

But while he's being tested on the question of fasting, there's a sudden interruption. A leader of the local synagogue pokes his head in and pulls Jesus out of the inquiry. He says, "My daughter has just died, but come lay your hands on her, and she will live."

Jesus slips through the door while the debate inside rages on, and as he heads to the man's house, another interruption occurs. A woman who's been hemorrhaging for twelve years reaches out and grabs his robe, believing that if she can only touch the fringe of his garment she'll be healed. Jesus stops to tell her, "Your faith has made you well," and it has because she is healed.

Jesus eventually reaches the man's house and quiets down the flute players who've been leading the mourning. He tells everyone that the girl isn't really dead, but sleeping. The crowd laughs at him and wants to get on with the funeral plans. But Jesus goes to the girl, takes her by the hand, and raises her.

He leaves from there to go on his way when another interruption comes. Two blind men cry out to him for mercy. He touches their eyes and they can see. Then he meets a man who's mute and demon-possessed. Jesus heals this man, too, but Pharisees who see it say that Jesus casts out demons only because he's in league with the ruler of demons.

In other words, this Scripture is first full of people who seem bent on making sure that Jesus has his schedule of beliefs packed and in proper order. Jesus openly engages with them, recognizing the legitimacy of their concerns, but also shows himself completely open to being interrupted by others who need him for something more. In touch with who he really is, he's not bound to anyone's schedule except God's. If God calls to him in an interruption, he's there for it. Knowing himself, first and foremost, as God's child, and responsive above all to God's will for him, he goes wherever God leads. Whether it's according to his schedule or through unexpected interruptions, Jesus is *there*.

Bound to our schedules as we often are, it's crucial to learn from him that it's through interruptions that God's call can often come. This is especially so if we pack our schedules tight for fear of losing control, for fear of getting lost in the world's wonder and mystery, for fear of being overwhelmed by the blooming, buzzing confusion that sometimes comes with it. There's always so much more to God's presence and action in this world than we can ever get a handle on or control, so that we need to set aside our fears and open up if we want to go with God. We need to let go and leave room for God to meet us out beyond the hard boundaries of our schedules, to meet us in interruptions that break in and bring us not what we're planning for and trying to stay on top of, but what we don't expect and can't control.

So we take a close look at our lives. We look at all the work we do, all of the demands people place on us, and all of the goals we set for ourselves. We look at the mass of plans, routines, and schedules that we make and wonder, "Who am I really in the middle of all that? Do I know myself in it, above all, as God's child, as someone who's ready first and foremost to go wherever God leads?"

Or am I afraid? Am I someone who instead tries to control my life with a bulk of routine, with a heavy wall of schedule that I cling to because I'm afraid of the mystery and the wonder, and the blooming, buzzing confusion that sometimes come with God's call?" If it's mostly the latter, then God probably has to come at me through interruptions. God probably has to hammer away to break through the thick armor of my plans in order to pull me out of whatever I'm up to and wherever I'm going to take me instead to what God's up to and to where God's going.

Christian writer, Frederick Buechner, recalls one late winter afternoon when he was walking to a class he was scheduled to teach but when he also noticed the beginnings of what promised to be a great sunset. He could see that all the right clouds, burning sky, and dark trees were in place for it. He went on to his classroom and found all the lights on and the students chattering away as they usually did. But just as he was about to begin the class as he normally would, he felt an impulse to snap off the lights. He went with that, and suddenly everything in the room disappeared except for the burning sunset that spilled through the west windows. Silence fell

over the entire room as both students and teacher watched for twenty minutes- twenty whole minutes while the spectacle of the sunset came and went. Buechner writes:

“Teachers do not normally plunge their students into that kind of darkness, and you might have expected a wisecrack or two or at least the creaking of chairs as people turned around to see if the old bird had finally lost his mind . . . “(But) for over twenty minutes nobody spoke a word. Nobody did anything. We just sat there in the near-dark and watched one day of our lives come to an end. . . What was great was the un-busyness of it. It was taking unlabelled, un-allotted time just to look with maybe more than our eyes at what was wonderfully there to be looked at without any obligation to think any constructive thoughts about it or turn it to any useful purpose later, without any weapon at hand in the dark to kill the time it took. It was the sense too that we were not just ourselves individually looking out at the winter sky but that we were in some way also each other looking out at it . . . The way this world works, people are very apt to use the words they speak not so much as a way of revealing, but as a way of concealing who they really are and what they really think, and that’s why more than a few moments of silence with people we do not know well are apt to make us tense and uneasy. . . But if we can bear to let it be, silence, of course, can be communion at a very deep level indeed, and that (time) was just that, and perhaps that was the greatest part of it all.

Buechner and his class understood what Jesus most fully lived and what every Christian struggles daily to understand and practice- namely, that there are times when we need to go with what we’ve got scheduled because God’s calling to us from within it, but other times when we have to welcome even big interruptions because God’s coming to us from within them instead. I think interruptions are especially God’s call to us when they’re strong enough to make us pause- pause to be silent, pause to better appreciate the whole world as God’s gift, pause to connect better with each other as God’s children within it, and pause to reflect on how we can best be healers for each other as Jesus was for those who came to him.

That’s the kind of pause in which our fears finally can be calmed and we can let go- let go to be with God and to go wherever God leads. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Great God of everyone, we bring to You again all our joys and concerns- those we’ve named aloud, those we speak in silence, and those only Your Spirit knows and prays for us. This morning we pray especially for renewed faith to go with You, to let go of our fears and take courage to follow wherever You lead, even if it means the interruption of all of our fine schedules and plans. Help us regularly to pause and be silent, to appreciate all of creation as Your gift, to connect better with each other as Your children, and to be healers for each other as Jesus was to those who came to him.

The way in which You lead is the way of love for all, so in love we pray for every sister and brother whether near or far who is in special need: for those sick and dying, for those anxious or depressed, for those in grief or lonely, for the hungry and malnourished, for the homeless and refugee, for any who are afflicted by injustice, oppression, violence, or war.

On this weekend of special remembrance in our country, we also pray our thanks for all who’ve gone before us in Your way. We thank You for those who’ve brought us into Your church where we yearn to learn and live Your love. We thank You for those in our nation and in any land, who have given and will give their very lives in pursuit of the freedom, justice, and peace that You want for all Your children. Help us to honor their dedication by our own lives of sacrificial service, service given in Your way for the sake of Your Kingdom come. We pray again for Your Kingdom to come in the way that Jesus has taught us, saying together, “Our Father, . . .” Amen.