

Fasting from Busyness, from hurry and worry

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, March 10, 2019)

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, and the word 'Lent' literally means 'spring,' when the dead of winter starts to give way to fresh sprouts and renewed life. But this liturgical season calls us first to something difficult that must happen before fresh sprouts can grow and new life be experienced, the new life that we celebrate on Easter Sunday.

Pope Benedict XVI said of Lent that it is "like a long 'retreat' during which we can turn back into ourselves and listen to the voice of God, in order to defeat the temptations of the Evil One. It is a period of spiritual struggle that we must experience alongside Jesus, not with pride and presumption, but using the arms of faith: prayer, listening to the word of God and honesty. In this way we will be able to celebrate Easter in truth, ready for the spiritual delight of new life."

In this modern, tech-savvy, busy world, many of us have lost touch with our spiritual heart. Lent invites us to have the courage to do the work required to reconnect with our heart, to turn back into ourselves, so that our lives are illuminated by God's love and our actions and words demonstrate that love.

On Ash Wednesday, some of us gathered in this sanctuary to begin the Lenten journey. We reflected on the busy lives we all lead and considered what it might look like to find a quiet center in our day in order to step out of our busyness.

This year I am using a Lenten resource created by musician, worship designer and leader Dr. Marcia McFee entitled, "Reconnecting with an Unhurried God." This resource was her response to the conversations her congregation had around the busy pace of life and how our frantic busyness places tremendous stress and strain on people's personal and spiritual well-being and on their relationships. The spiritual practices invite

people to fast from busyness, from worry and from hurry, and to engage with the theme of slowing down or “de-cluttering” some aspect of their lives.

Exploration: I invite you to talk with a neighbour and discuss the question, “When was the last time you had a chance to catch your breath? We will take two minutes. I will indicate by way of a chime at the 1-minute mark, so each person has an opportunity to speak. The question again is, “When was the last time you had a chance to catch your breath?”

We are busy people and this busyness begins at a very young age. We are constantly on the move, running from one activity to the next, glued to our iPads, iPhones, and computers, filling our calendars to overflowing, working endless hours, raising children, caring for aging parents, and on and on and on.

Similarly, our minds are constantly busy, thoughts obsess us almost as soon as we wake up. In his reflections on human doing rather than human being in his book *just this*, Richard Rohr writes that “our thinking is compulsive, repetitive, and habitual.” We are forever writing inner commentaries on everything, making judgments, having conversations with invisible others, “endeavouring to ‘take control of a situation’ – as if we ever could anyway!” Rarely do we take the opportunity to stop, to reflect, and to rest our bodies and our minds. People are sleep deprived, joyless, frantic, moody, easily conflicted, and unsettled.

I wonder, do we ever consider what the cost is to our personal well-being and to our relationships when we succumb to incessant busyness? Anxiety, depression, stress, exhaustion, and ill health rule our lives while joy, relaxation, serenity, and play are rare occurrences.

What is driving this constant busyness? There are many answers to these questions. Perhaps we feel more secure, successful, accomplished, and valued if we keep busy. Some people believe that their busyness defines them and if they stop being busy, they will lose themselves. We use busyness to avoid spending time with ourselves because we are fearful of what we might discover if we stop being busy and spend time in quiet. We are addicted to busyness and to noise.

On the first Sunday of Lent the text often read is the temptation story. In the wilderness Jesus fasts and confronts the temptations of life. He wrestles with his inner tempter who seeks to convince him to embrace the world position of being a King who has great power and control. This was what many of his followers expected of him. But Jesus knew that power and greed were not the way of God, not the way of faith, and certainly not the way of love.

The temptation of busyness in the modern world is robust, and we are giving in to it. In the following quote I found on The Worship Cloud we are taken into the tempter's mind and we hear the conversation he is having with himself, "Sometimes, just for the fun of it, I sit on a high point and look down on everyone, like the top of a mountain, or my favourite place, the pinnacle of the temple. I spend hours trying to spot one person from the millions I can see, who has not succumbed to my charm; but I know it's useless! Every single one of them has given in to my persuasive arguments!"

Strong is the pull of want, greed, success, materialism, and even technology that feed our busyness. A father said, "For several evenings at bedtime I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer. She would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us from E-mail."

Lent invites us to confront the temptation of busyness and to fast from it. In Jesus' day fasting was the way that people used their bodies to pray based on a desert spirituality that taught that only when one's heart and body were joined in humility before God could one connect with his or her spiritual essence. By depriving himself, Jesus connected to a deeper truth about life and about God's love, and about the consequences of power and control.

What we may learn from Jesus' experience in the wilderness is that if we allow ourselves to fast from busyness, we may discover a deeper

hunger within us, a hunger for quiet, for relaxation, for joy, and for peace of mind.

Richard Rohr writes, “The Desert Fathers and Mothers, who emerged in the early centuries after Jesus. . .discovered that the ‘seeking of calmness’ came “through their profound experience of what they called ‘prayer of quiet,’ building on Jesus’ talk of ‘going to your inner room’ and ‘not babbling on as the pagans do.’” Fasting from busyness, from worry and from hurry are about allowing ourselves to go to our inner room, to find a quiet place in our home so that we might nurture the sprouts of inner peace and personal and relational well-being.

During our worship time this Lent we will fast from busyness as we gather in this holy space. Every week there will be an insert for you to take home that will give you some guidance for daily moments of fasting from busyness, from hurry and worry.

I encourage us to let ourselves fast from busyness, to fast from hurry and worry and to reconnect with an unhurried God. Let us enter our heart room during this season, to stop and rest and allow peace and stillness to renew us. If we are willing to attend to this with intention and mindfulness, we may discover the spontaneous and blissful state of tranquility that can alter our lifestyles. We will celebrate at Easter the new life that we have nurtured and rejoice in the renewal of our body, mind, and spiritual well-being. May this be so for us all.