

Change of Plans

This week was a week where the best laid plans didn't pan out. (Including a sermon based on this week's lectionary)

And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:39,40)

As many of you will know, my daughter Amelia wasn't feeling well this week and because that involved a fever we are now waiting for a Covid test this coming week. That means we are currently in isolation. Thankfully Amelia is feeling better and I am fine.

Being isolated, over a Sunday, meant putting together a service in my absence at the last minute. Thankfully we are a community of many who can pick up such tasks. I am grateful.

This seemed to be a theme this week for me. I set out to do one thing and another altogether happened. And when I finally caught on, I became acutely aware that God was trying to get my attention. Christ kept popping up in my week, unexpectedly. Let me share two of those stories.

I had an appointment this week. I was sitting in the waiting room grateful for a few minutes to check my email on my phone and get back to a couple of people waiting for an answer. A woman came into the room, looked around for somewhere to sit (there were many seats much further away from me) and chose the one directly across from me announcing, "I guess it is safe to sit here!"

I looked up and smiled and went back to my phone (as we often do in waiting rooms). And then she started to talk to me. At first I thought I could smile and nod and she'd go back to her own thing, but soon realized she was going to have a full-blown conversation with me. In fact, I was going to hear most of her life story, one that involved living in her car for a time, now living in substandard rental housing, a landlord that was taking advantage of her and a whole variety of other items from a not so easy life.

A thought floated through my mind early on. This was Christ sitting across from me. What does one do when Christ is trying to get your attention? You put your

phone away in your purse. I sat and listened. I asked a couple of questions. I got a variety of sympathetic looks from others waiting in the room. I looked this woman in the eye and smiled (with my eyes, since we were all wearing masks).

It was a brief encounter. I imagine, for this woman, it was not a usual encounter. I imagine many people probably shut her out or move away. I had a sense of God saying, "Pay attention! Put your phone away!!"

Another moment when God caught me off guard happened while walking my dog. It was late in the day. I was tired and not feeling overly sociable. I took a quiet route. And then I just happened to pass by a door that opened and out came a woman that I know in passing. Of course we said hello. I hadn't seen her in almost a year. The next thing I knew I was hearing about how her marriage had ended and she was now working two or three jobs, whatever she could get, to afford her rental here in town and keep her kids close to their dad. She looked exhausted (she was working) and confessed her loneliness.

Much like the other encounter, I thought a quick hello would suffice and I could walk on, feeling pity for myself in my own fatigue. But I quickly caught on that God was trying to get my attention. So I stopped and I listened. We are going to meet up again, when it is safe to do so, and have a cup of coffee.

It was after these two encounters that it became evident that Amelia would need a Covid test and I would be in isolation for a week, at least. Now I had to find someone to take our Sunday service. At this point, God had my attention! I could almost hear an audible voice - "Put your phone away, stop walking, let go of your best laid plans..."

We get so caught up in what we think is important; what we think is worthy of our time. We get overburdened with our "to do" lists or perhaps bored and lonely with not enough to do. Meanwhile, Christ is in our midst waiting to grab our attention. More often than not it isn't for more than a few moments and a listening ear. Sometimes it is more involved and asks more of us. When we stop, when we get out of the way, when we put our phones away, we encounter God in unexpected places.

I am a little more attentive now. This will likely pass and I will get busy again. But I know that God will get my attention again and I am hopeful that next time I will be a little quicker to recognize Christ and respond with my full and undivided attention.