**Sermon 9-16-18**

**Paul Purdue preacing**

**Spiritual Goals to Escape a Distracted Life - SEptember 16, 2018**

Moses caught a grand vision of how to liberate his enslaved during worship. Let’s just ponder that: Egyptian slavery starts to crumble as Moses turns aside, takes off his shoes, and stands on holy ground listening for God to call out from the bush. Paul tells us that creation itself groans longing for liberation, longing for God’s kingdom to be revealed on earth and within us. (Romans 8:22) Every shrub may hide a burning bush, every culvert cradles a font, ever table offers an altar, if we will turn aside and worship. Worship shapes the soul. The first four of our Ten Commandments reminds us to worship. Where will the grand themes of our lives emerge from? When do we weigh God’s plans and life’s deepest flow? Take off your shoes, turn aside, look for holy ground, and step inside worship.

Since the main road into the park was closed we took a back road and hiked down a different trailhead. It took a bit longer, but we made our way to the safety of the river before the sun disappeared behind the mountains. With a high fire risk, we drowned our campfire with river water before crashing for the night. At 4am an unfamiliar human voice is more terrifying than a bobcat. Human yelling jolted us straight up in our tent, two flashlights blinded us as two forest rangers began scolding us, “You boys are not too.” Apparently our lack of wisdom paired with a knowledge of backroads allowed us to skirt around an evacuation order and camped in an active fire zone. We hurriedly stuffed our gear into packs and made our way out holding one flashlight. We stopped at the crest of the gorge to watch the wildfire dance in the moonlight. It weaved in orange, yellow, and red along the opposite ridge line, terrifying and beautiful. Fire worries a farmer.

Burned grassland would have threatened Moses and Jethro’s business as Moses had no tools to extinguish the fire. The best business decision surely would have been to flee with the sheep. Moses leaves mundane business behind and draws near to the fire. God created curiosity. When Moses sees the fire, he sees something strange and mysterious within it - a minor miracle. Moses turned aside, saying to himself, “I must check this out.”

What do you do with those little holy nudges that arise not from God’s digital marketing strategy, but whisper low from your soul. “Slow down, turn aside, check this out!” Jesus whispers, “Keep on seeking and you will find hope; keep on knocking and faith’s door will finally open; keep on asking and you will receive love; keep on turning aside and you will get a new vocation.” Moses, Paul, Pam, you need not live as a fugitive... stop doing...turn aside...take off your shoes...stand before the holy...worship...tend to your soul...llisten for God’s plan for your life.

Barbara Brown Taylor credits Moses with the spiritual intuition to turn aside. She sees turning aside as essential to spiritual work. Spiritual work always runs deeper than the daily grind. Moses turns aside from the duties of the herd. Please do not think the ancient lifestyle afforded Moses an easy pace and choice. No drawing water by hand, heating with fire, fighting off lions with a staff, and toothaches without Tylenol was hard. Moses took a sabbath from his livelihood knowing unattended sheep can get in trouble quickly. Yet, Moses turned aside.

Breaking life’s routine by turning aside readied Moses’ soul for worship. God sent up a mysterious flare and Moses noticed. With Moses engaged, God called from the burning bush, “Moses, Moses! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.” Engaged in worship, God rekindles Moses’ long-dormant passion for justice and equality. You remember Moses’ story: born a slave during ethnic cleansing, saved through a basket and a bold sister, pulled from the river by a queen, wet-nursed by his own Hebrew mother, and raised as Pharaoh's son.  Once grown he sees a task-master beating a fellow Hebrew, strikes down the slaveholder, and buries the body in the sand. Moses flees to the wilderness and lives as a fugitive shepherd. Married, happy, loved by his father-in- law, established, and secure, God whispers an old dream: “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard the cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about the pain of unequal justice and opportunity, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians. I’ve seen the oppression. So get going, Moses, I’m sending you, the most powerful nation on earth to free my people from injustice!”

Such a deep calling calls up Moses’ inadequacies, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh?”But even as the call evokes Moses’ deep fears, it empowers him, for God says, “Go. I’ll be with you...and after you. Free the people, you all will come back here and worship on this mountain.” The whole liberation story is framed in worship. It begins with Moses turning aside and worshiping and ends with a free people worshipping God! What if Moses did not turn aside? What if feeling the need to get back to work, he never gazed at the bush or took off his shoes to worship? Perhaps, if  Moses had not turned aside, the Hebrews would have languished in slavery for another 244 years? I wonder if those sermons Martin Luther King, Jr., heard his daddy preach every Sunday helped him find the words, “I have a dream”? Would Martin would have found that holy dream at a ballpark or piano lessons?

When do we turn aside and hear God calling? Do we attend to our soul? We do not have to stand barefoot in the sand watching the sun rise over the Atlantic to take sabbath? No, we can turn aside and vacate for just a few minutes every morning? You can empty your soul and listen for God, just by paying attention. Take off your shoes, and stand on holy ground! When our boys were little, I always wished every restaurant had a dog, because Millie, the wonder dog, ate anything that landed on the linoleum. But you can find holy holy ground even amid the half-chewed carrots on your kitchen if you turn aside and ponder the mystic connection between head, hand, and mouth. In November, you can find holy ground in the Community Center if you turn aside from normal Friday plans and break bread with our Room In the Inn guests. You might find Jesus by slowing down and trying to say “Gho ler ghay” to one of our Golden Triangle friends. You might hear a deeper calling from God, if you turn off that endless news cycle and join a Sunday school class.

Stop. Take the time to take off your shoes. Pay attention.Tend to a sense of awe...the grandeur of bugs, the miracle of seeds to fruit, the power of the whirlwind. Don’t just pass through life, pay attention. Slow down and worship. Take the time to turn aside! Unfasten your electronic leash and heed the holy whisper.

Our second passage reminds us that Jesus was busy. Jesus’ work was significant. He defined his mission as  proclaiming God’s kingdom and healing on earth as in heaven. Jesus came to save the world and that is a lot of work!  We protestants imagine a carefree super-cool Jesus. This easy-going Jesus may not be a Gospel portrait. Indeed Mark portrays Jesus as harried, chased by a needy crowd, which pressed in upon him, and seeking to suck the life from him. .  Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, gets frustrated with the disciples, and retreats when hearing of John the Baptist’s death. Jesus struggles with the heaviness of the world.

Perhaps, you feel pressed down by the news of the day? Maybe you can’t believe what you just read on Twitter? Perhaps your schedule presses in on you, crowding out the abundant life? Perhaps too many hands reach out to steal your focus? What should we do?

Turn aside, stop, take off your shoes, pay attention, hear the good news again. The whole town gathered near the door. Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. Peter and his crew tracked Jesus down. When they found Jesus, they told him, “Everyone’s looking for you!”

In Mark 3:10, Jesus healed so many people that everyone who was sick pushed forward so that they could touch Him. In Mark 1:45, Jesus wasn’t able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere. In Luke 4:42, when daybreak arrived, Jesus went to a deserted place. The crowds were looking for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving them. In Luke 5:16, “News of Jesus spread even more and huge crowds gathered to listen and to be healed from their illnesses. But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places for prayer.”

Oh, we will never heal anyone or bring much Good News if we do not seek out the deserted places! Without sabbath our lives will consume us. Without worship our diversions will dominate us. Without prayer our games will guide us. Without turning aside we may live as fugitives in the wilderness. never tasting our true vocation.

After leaving the deserted places, Jesus could preach hope and bring healing.

After turning aside and talking to God, Moses found the courage to confront Pharaoh.

Oh, let us not live as fugitives from God’s deeper call to justice, healing, and love. Let us not escape in fear but find power to make our appointment with Pharaoh, for God will go with us and we will worship again on the mountain. Let us not miss seeing the Red Sea part, the captives dance, and injustice be cast into the sea. No, let us enter the garden and pray, so that we might take up our cross and bring healing and hope to the world. Let us take the time to take off our shoes, so that we may walk the path God has laid for us this day! Amen!