

Sermon 3-17-24

Paul Purdue preaching

Last Wednesday, Hunter, Sol, Mercedes and I worked on building an irrigation path to divert groundwater away from a home and towards a catch basin. There was not a nice stack of matching concrete pavers from Home Depot but instead a pile of preindustrial stones collected from nearby fields. Each rock had its own size, shape, height, depth, length, flatness, roundness, angle, and fit. The irrigation path was more puzzle than prefab. Hunter and I slowly added rocks and mortice on our end while Mercedes sped along. When we asked Mercedes, the master mason, how we were doing, he smiled: *“Perfecto por primera vez”*. “Perfecto”! I smiled, until Hunter added the qualifier: “perfect for your first time.” We laughed as Mercedes dug out a few of our perfectly placed stones, actually perfecting our work.

According to the FCC, the first radio transmission of a speech or music program occurred in 1906. There were wax cylinder phonographs before that, but really all music, news, theater, lectures, sermons, and gossip was only heard live until 118 years ago. Let that sink in. 110 years ago, if you heard a song, you could likely meet the singer and the first guitar you heard was played by a family member. Music was live, homemade, and community based, resounding from churches, front porches, and traveling town-hall shows until about 100 years ago. Take a moment and try to imagine that!

For millennia folks like Sol, Mercedes, Hunter and I would have done our work free from the songs, podcasts, books, and shows that fill up our quiet spaces through our headphones, earbuds, iPhones speakers, amplifiers, and microphones and transmission towers. We do not know yet the full effect on our mental health and the social fabric of all this individualistic consumption of media content. We will likely never know, but it might be interesting to discover if people think they are worse singers now than in 1910 when the Metropolitan Opera first broadcast a radio show? Even without data, it seems clear that today, it is harder than any time in modern history or prehistory for human beings to be present with our thoughts. We need wilderness, worship, daily devotion, and community to hear from ourselves, from God, and from people committed to surrounding us with love and forgiveness. More than ever we need to intentionally cultivate the quiet places that grow grace.

“As Jesus was coming up out of the baptismal waters, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Child, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.” Almost, at once the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. There were wild animals, and the angels cared for Jesus. After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, teaching, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”

Is it possible, these 40 days Jesus set apart, 40 days alone, 40 days free from distraction, 40 days present with God perhaps provided the deep clarification Jesus needed to fully embrace God’s calling on his life. When do we quiet down and become

fully present with God and ourselves? When do we think deeply about God's call, plan, or will for our life? Jesus "often withdrew" into what Luke called "the lonely places" and prayed. (L. 5). Jesus prayed all night long before choosing the disciples and before embracing the unwelcomed way of the cross. During these 40 days of clarification, Matthew tells us the devil offered Jesus power, thrones, thrills, over-the-top showy miracles that would leave audience's fainting in praise. Mark mentions no specific temptations. Mark's wilderness reads more like Jacob's wrestling all night with God- no details just the inner struggle and then a new name and a deeper clarity (Genesis 32). Jesus leaves the silence of the inner wilderness with a clarified mission saying: "*Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!*" And Jesus begins to live into that newfound missional clarity offering healing, food, justice, and welcome to all people- trust this good news. Jesus trusts in the good news.

The practices of prayer, daily meditation, small groups, and worship free us from accidental living, where we just bump into one thing and then the next.

Searching for just the right rock, not too tall or round with a shape that fit the gap without too much mortice, I wondered if I allowed myself enough time to really hear from God, or even my own soul? When do you get the quiet time you need to get your head and heart right? When do we get still enough to find clarity? When do we mute the songs, voices, narrators, amusing posts, and dire alerts and sit silent before the Lord, who whispers "be still and know that I am God"? (Psalm 46)

Despite our need for solitude, we are not ultimately designed for just stillness and retreat. Jesus does not stay in the wilderness! Yes, Jesus' practices daily prayer, occasional all-nighters, mini-retreats, 3 annual pilgrimages, small group spiritual discussions, and weekly worship but Jesus did not come simply to call us into prayer and worship. Jesus' mission was not just to get people back in church. *Jesus came announcing God's good news, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"*

In Puebla Mexico we toured the Mole museum, dedicated to the spicy-chocolate sauce and the nuns who, as the story goes, "created" Mole in their monastery in 1680. There is a lovely exhibit about indigenous faith traditions and the colonial church on the second floor. The nuns never left the monastery, and all the windows looked in towards the courtyard and away from the world. They spent their lives in quiet prayer avoiding temptations. There is a brand of Christianity in America today that only looks inward, viewing the world and the people that God loves as sources of temptation. It sees science and diverse ideas as temptations. It is walled off in fear from the world. Jesus did not build a church building much less a monastery with no windows. Jesus lived out in the world of ideas, dialoguing with sinners, self-described saints, pharisees, saccades, samaritans, tax gathers, outcasts and Hellenest. The Apostle Paul hung out with contemporary philosophers. (Acts 17) When asked why he spent time with those cast out or maybe who just found themselves outside of church, Jesus replied "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2) A deep faith does not need to be walled off from different people, other ideas or science. A deep trust in God sends us outward into the world. "*Now is the*

time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

The Christian life is about helping people find healing or wholeness of life: peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, joy, justice, love, generosity and forgiveness. Prayer, retreat, searching the scriptures, small groups and shared worship are all tools to help us live lives soaked in grace, but our spiritual practices, although essential, are not the end goal. No, faith moves us away from cloistered walls: "Here comes God's kingdom! Trust this good news!" Sabbath empowers and guides our journey, changing hearts and lives so we can help construct God's kin-dom of love and justice. Sabbath renews, nourished, clarifies and heals us along our journey.

So today, I want to leave you with two questions. 1) When and where are you making time to be silent enough to hear from God, from yourself, and from this community that has pledged to surround you with love and forgiveness? The second question might be harder: to whom are you carrying the good news of hope, liberation, and love? Maybe we all need to sit with those questions? I can assure you that Pastor Heather, Kate, Emma, Hunter, Matt and myself, along with so many wonderful lay leaders would delight in chatting with you about these questions, just reach out.

May we unplug and enter the wilderness so that we may reenter this world trusting in the good news! Amen.