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Retaining Serenity in the Midst of Insanity Psalm 43: 10-11 Luke 10: 38-42

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Brian talked last week about the paradigm shift in our world as we have moved from the age of manufacturing to the age of information, and about how that has affected our culture, including our churches. I'd like to follow up today and talk a bit about how this shift has affected us as individuals and families, and has, in fact, so depleted us spiritually that other cultures sometimes send missionaries here, to us, to try to help us with the effects of this spiritual impoverishment.

I think I've spoken here before about the book RESTORING MARGIN TO OVERLOADED LIVES, so I won't belabor the book too extensively, but it remains one of the most important books I have ever read in terms of gaining a better understanding of our age and its affect on us psychologically and spiritually.

The premise is that throughout all of history, complexity, information and change increased gradually. But then around the 1970's, along with the widespread use of computers, the speed by which these things increased went into overdrive. Indeed what had always been measured by a gradual graph suddenly shot up into what is called a J curve, from

this  to this: 

“We have more 'things per person' than any other nation in history, says Swenson. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can't fit into garages. Having first imprisoned us with debt, possessions then take over our houses and occupy our time. This begins to sound like an invasion. Everything I own owns me.”

And this rampant increase in our possessions is only one measure of how this has happened. Bob Moorhead said this: “The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider Freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less, we buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less wisdom, more experts, yet more problems.

“We must have some room to breathe, says Swenson. We need freedom to think and permission to heal. Our relationships are being starved to death by velocity. No one has the time to listen, let alone love. Our children lay wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions. Is God now pro-exhaustion? Doesn't the Good Shepherd lead us beside still waters anymore? Who plundered those wide-open spaces of the past, and how can we get them back? There are no fallow lands for our emotions to lie down and rest in.”

Perhaps we need to memorize this new version of the 23rd Psalm that I recently came across:

The Lord is my Pace Setter, I shall not rush,
God makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,
and provides me with images of stillness,
Which restore my serenity.

God leads me in ways of efficiency,
through calmness of mind; and the guidance of peace.

Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,
I will not fret, for God's presence is here.

God prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity,
by anointing my head with oils of tranquility,

My cup of joyous energy overflows.

Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours,
For I shall walk in the pace of my God,
and dwell in that house for ever.

So how do we get from point A to point B, from being choked to death by the glut, in our world, of complexity, information and change to those quiet intervals we just heard about? Well, we have to do it by taking control, with God's help. The culture isn't going to change. We have to change. And how? Well, for one thing, we need to stop the glorification of busy. The glorification of too much stress. It doesn't make us important. It just makes us exhausted and out of sorts and a pain in the neck to our near and dear ones.

So how do we stop the glorification of busy, then? I think we do it by learning to live in a different kind of time. The Greeks had a notion that there was not one but two kinds of time. There is kronos time, which is what we are used to, clock time as we move through our days. But there is also another kind of time which they call Kairos. Kairos time is not about moving from this moment to the next, it is not clock time, but is spiritual time. It has to do with how fully present you are to this moment. You know how it is, like when you are involved in some creative pursuit and lose all track of time? When you are in the flow, in the zone? A brief visit to that kind of time renews and restores like nothing else.

And we can have it not just when we are creating something, but can increasingly have it throughout our days, in our work, our family life, our friendships, etc when we learn to be fully present to the now. To take control of our squirrel like brains and quiet them, bring them under control and quiet them down.

You see, a lot of this is inner work. You retired folks were probably thinking, “this doesn’t apply to me because I have plenty of time now.” But you can have nothing but chronological time and still not have that sense of kairos, of a calm, quiet mind, a contented heart, a peaceful Spirit, full presence to each moment.

I think this is what poor Martha, who gets such a bad rap in scripture, was learning. She was learning about Kairos time. About the importance of stopping the action both literally and internally in order to find her own wholeness.

Because, you see, this is what Jesus was about, wasn’t it?

As Swenson wrote, “Do you think Jesus would have carried a pocket calendar? Would he have consulted it before making a commitment? Would he have bypassed the lepers because his calendar said he might be late to the Nazareth Spring Banquet? The clock and the Christ are not close friends. We jump at the alarm of a Seiko, but sleep through the still, small voice.”

Dear Friends, let us wake up to the still, small voice. Let us learn to be fully present to the moment, in love. Let us take charge, with God’s gracious help, of our busy lives or just our overly busy minds, because there is racket everywhere, within and without, and its all just a noisy pseudo life. Let us always remember that Jesus said “I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly.”

