

E –Life vs. Real Life

Sterling UMC
January 30, 2011
Luke 10:38 – 42, Psalm 133

Alice in E-Land Skit

There may be some of you here this morning that can identify with what you just saw. Like Alice you find yourself caught up in a world that has drastically changed. A world of busyness, a world of information overload, a world of technology that allows us to be constantly connected. There may be others of you are here this morning have no idea what just happened. It may even seem that they were speaking an entirely foreign language. But over the course of the last 10 years, some brand-new words have entered our vocabulary. Words like e-mail, Xbox, MySpace, Facebook, laptop, texting, blog; these are words that didn't exist a few short years ago.

Then there are other words that have changed meaning completely. I remember when a BlackBerry was a small sweet bumpy black little piece of fruit that I would pick off the tree in my neighbors backyard and eat. Now it's something that almost everyone carries around in their hand or in their pocket to help keep them connected. And twitter and tweet was something that the birds did in the springtime not a means to keep the entire world abreast of your every thought, opinion, and movement.

And while all of these new words and gadgets have entered our vernacular, there are some things that are disappearing. I mean, when was the last time you saw a pay phone? When was the last time you used a phone book? I have a mountain of them piling up in my garage waiting to be recycled that I have never even opened. You remember pen pals? That whole concept has just about completely vanished.

Now don't get me wrong I'm not saying that there is anything inherently wrong in any of these technologies or social networking platforms. I believe they have the potential to help us greatly in our daily lives. I can take my phone right here with me anywhere I go and instantaneously I can be reached by telephone, text message, or e-mail. All of those things right here in the palm of my hand. It is such a comfort to know that when my kids are out and about that I can know where they are at any given moment, and that if there is an emergency or they need something they have a way of contacting me. Things like Facebook and MySpace have enabled people to reconnect with old friends, to stay in contact with loved ones when separated by many miles, and to share both the joys and struggles of our everyday lives.

But on the other hand, taken to an extreme these things can be very harmful. Did you know for example, that the average teenager sends between 75 and 100 text messages every day? And this is not just a problem specific to teenagers. The Internet, video games, chat rooms, and social networking consume countless numbers of hours. And we all know some of the dark and dangerous roads that these things can lead people

down. All of us have seen people who are so tied to their cell phones or blackberries that they nearly run their car off the road trying to read an e-mail or send a text message. Insurance agencies now report that texting while driving is one of the leading causes of accidents, especially with teenagers.

But I believe an even greater danger comes when these things begin to take the place or become a substitute for real relationships. In some ways we are more connected than ever before, and in other ways we are more disconnected than ever. It is possible today to almost carry on a complete relationship online or by text messaging and not ever have to need or to interact with the person face-to-face. In this digital age it is so easy to isolate and insulate ourselves from the real world around us. Or we become so addicted to being connected that we can't simply let go and just be. We are afraid of being "unplugged". I know some people who almost go through withdrawal when they have to turn their cell phone or e-mail off. If we are not careful our connectedness can cause us to become disconnected from those who are the closest and most important to us.

This morning I want to conclude our series *A New Year, a New You* by looking at a final resolution that many people make at the new year. We resolve to slow down and take more time to spend quality time with our families and with God. We resolve to strengthen our relationships with those closest to us and to deepen our faith and our relationship with the one who created us. So how do we find REAL life in the midst of the E-Life that seems to be going on constantly all around us? I'd like to explore that question with you this morning especially as it relates to our time with God.

A moment ago we read the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. It's a very familiar story. One that I believe has great significance for us to consider today. Now let me ask you, did you find yourself in the story? Sometimes no matter how hard we try, we don't seem to focus our time on the things that are most important.

The ultimate tragedy of our modern life is that same tragedy that Martha faced – offered the opportunity to sit at Jesus' feet, we can't spare Jesus any time.

It's not easy to tune into what's important. With all the noise and demands, we tend to focus on whatever is most urgent, or whatever is loudest. Whatever we tune into gets our attention and sets the agenda for our life.

In the story Martha made the choice to allow all of the activity to crowd out the Lord. Mary made a choice not be distracted and to focus on Jesus instead of the noise.

Friends we were created to have fellowship with God. God wants our worship; he seeks our communion, he desires our fellowship. From the very beginning this is the way it was designed. One of our greatest privileges as Christians is having real communion with God because of Jesus Christ. Strangely, many believers let day after day go by without so much as a few minutes spent in God's presence. We can spend

hours chatting, and texting, and following all of our friends on Facebook and twitter, but we find it difficult to carve out the time to chat with our greatest friend.

How do we know this is so important to God? We don't have to look any further than Jesus Himself to find the answer to that question. Consider this:

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

In the midst of many needs, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place where He could be alone with His Father in prayer.

Luke 6:12 “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.”

Mark 1:35 “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.”

All through the N.T. references are made to the importance of prayer in the life of Jesus. Obviously prayer was an energizing habit of His life.

How intriguing to think that the One who needed to pray so little because of who He was, prayed so much. There is no way to look at Jesus without noticing the depth of His devotional life. It was an essential part of who He was.

Many people look at Jesus and say, “Oh, how He healed.” Others look at Him and say, “Oh what a great teacher.” Some might look at him and proclaim, “Oh how he loved.” All of them would be right. But we need to look once more and proclaimed “Oh how He prayed.”

Prayer was a priority action for Him. It was so important that He taught His disciples how to pray. Which by the way, we will be studying next Sunday as I began a series based on the Lord's Prayer. Why would prayer be so important to Jesus? Why would it be such a passion with Him? We see one possible answer in John 6:38 where Jesus says, “I have come down from heaven not to do my Will but to do the will of Him who sent Me.” Jesus was so committed to His Father's will that He wanted to listen often to the Father.

That is what an intentional time of personal prayer and worship does for us; It enables us to hear God's voice and to discern his will.

A man was having difficulty communicating with his wife and concluded that she was becoming hard of hearing. So he decided to conduct a test without her knowing about it.

One evening he sat in a chair on the far side of the room. Her back was to him and she could not see him. Very quietly he whispered, "Can you hear me?" There was no response.

Moving a little closer, he asked again, "Can you hear me now?" Still no reply.

Quietly he edged closer and whispered the same words, but still no answer. Finally, he moved right in behind her chair and said, "Can you hear me now?" To his surprise and chagrin, she responded with irritation in her voice, "For the fourth time, yes!"

It's funny: we accuse God of not hearing what we say, what we pray. We figure He's up there not listening to anything we say. In fact, the opposite is true. As we holler up, "Can you hear me?", He hollers back, "Yes! But can you hear me?" Folks, we're the deaf ones, not God. And when we take the time to regularly go to him in private prayer we cultivate ears to hear and hearts to obey.

Another thing that an intentional time of personal prayer and worship does for us is it provides spiritual food and strength.

When we spend time alone with God each day we are spiritually nourished. It's not enough for us to come to church on Sunday morning and have communion and fellowship with God here. That only provides spiritual nourishment once a week.

What happens if we miss a meal? We get weak. We get shaky. Our energy decreases. We have no strength in ourselves to face the pressures of the world; we have no strength to face the onslaughts of the devil; we have no strength to face the temptations of the flesh. But our time with God enables to overcome.

The final thing that an intentional time of prayer and devotion does is it demonstrates to Christ that we love him. The object of our love is usually the object that will consume our time. If we love a person, one of the things that evidences our love is our desire to be with that person.

We need to make this the day in which we "get close to Christ, sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His words". We need to make this a day in which we will set priorities in our life so that from this day forward we will put the Lord first and be on watch for anything, even good things that might distract us from the Lord. That's the way to REAL life.

We have to remember that our true worth is measured by how many friends we have on Facebook. It's not determined by how much money you make, how many hours you work, or the title on your door, or how many people follow your blog. Your value is not based on how busy you are. You don't have to prove your worth by overworking.

A hundred years from now, what is going to be more important, spending time with God, or watching some television show? What is going to matter more, the fact that you conquered the latest videogame, or that you intentionally and regularly sought out God for encouragement and guidance in dealing with difficult situation in your life?

The average person lives 77 years, 28000 days, or 670,000 hours. The average person spends 40 minutes on the telephone or 2 years in a lifetime, watches 3 hrs of tv/day, 2 hours online in some capacity, that's 7 years in a lifetime. The average Christian spends less than 10 minutes a day with the God of the universe, the truest friend. That's less than 6 hours a month, 3 days a year, less than 7 months in a lifetime. This isn't meant to guilt us into anything. This is not something that works when it is forced or coerced. It has got to be something that you decide to do because you know you need it. And it's the right to do.

Today I urge you to friend request God. Cultivate a precious relationship with Him. Don't neglect it. Make it special. Love Him. Draw close to Him. Whisper, "I love You, Lord," into His ear throughout the day. Set aside special moments when you open His love letter to you. Sing His praises. Lift up His name. Quiet your heart before Him. Let the littleness of your life get lost in His greatness. Pray to Him. Worship Him. Shut out the world until you only hear God. Become like a child and bask in His embrace.

Find ways to cultivate your relationship with God. Be a Mary not a Martha. Make your devotional life a high priority. Protect it. Cherish it. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Every day, find a way to unplug and quiet your heart in God's presence. There is your peace. There is your victory. There is your strength. There is your first love.

Wherever you may be this week, from prayerful to prayerless, perhaps you're thirsty for more of God, perhaps you're desiring a fresh touch from Him. God is here in this place. All He asks from us is this: "Be still, and know that I am God." He wants to be your friend today.