

Slowing Down in a Hurry up World

Sterling UMC

January 8, 2012

Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 6:30-32

How many of you would say that you are busy? We almost feel obligated to say that, don't we? If you meet someone at the grocery store or run into them at McDonald's, and you ask them how they're doing, almost invariably they'll tell you how busy they are and start rattling off a list of activities -- and their children's activities.

I get to talk to a lot of people and I can hardly believe how busy some of you are. Most of you work during the day. And then the rest of your time revolves around your kids. Basketball practice on Mondays. Music lessons on Tuesdays. Wednesday is church night. Thursday is scouts. Friday night is game night. Saturday is soccer. And after church on Sunday, you plop down on the couch to watch the game. Then you remember that somewhere in there you have cook dinner, clean the house, help with homework, take care of the yard, pay the bills. You fall into to bed at night. And start all over again the next day.

So we're in a hurry, we're busy, we're frenzied, we're frenetic all the time. And you know what's interesting; we're busy even when we're not busy. We're hurried even when we're not in a hurry.

You know our parsonage is in Forrest Ridge and usually I take Lincoln Ave to get home for lunch or at the end of the day. And I notice this; the speed limit on that road is 25 mph. And when somebody's driving 24 it really irritates me. Now I mean the speed limit is 25 mph, but when someone's driving 24 it's like, "What's wrong with you? Come on! Get moving!" And so now suddenly the speed maximum has become the speed minimum. Have you noticed that? And if you're driving below the speed maximum there's something wrong with you.

This is how it works when I go to the grocery store, which is nearly every day to get my yogurt and bagel on the way to the office. I pull up to the checkout lines with my few little items and I look around and I scan quickly and try to figure out, which one am I going to get out of fastest. Now there's a certain method to this. First of all you look at the cashiers and you try to figure out which one looks the most proficient at what they do. Then you balance that with which line looks the shortest and then you look to see, in that short line how many items are in each person's basket. And then quickly within a second or two you make an assessment. And then you get in the line you think is going to be the fastest. Then this is the best part, you look out of the corner of your eye and you remember you would have been behind the woman in the red sweater and you watch to see whether you got out faster than she did or not. And then if you don't you get up to the front and you think, "What's the deal? Why?" It like that extra 30 seconds really matters.

Now not all of you, some you say, "You know I've got this thing figured out. I'm not rushed. I feel like I have a pretty healthy pace in my life." And that's terrific, and yet I'm guessing even those of you who feel that way you know somebody who needs what we're going to be talking about over the next four weeks as we talk about Cures for the Out-of-Control Life. And we're going to be trying to understand both in scripture and in just helpful ideas what it is that helps us to have the life that God intends for us to have.

The other day I had someone say to me, "You know I'm really anxious to come and hear you preach this series of sermons about how to get a handle on your life. You have one of the most

out of control lives I know. And they're right. I mean have you seen my desk? And my answer to them was, "You know that's why I'm preaching this series of sermons. Not because I know the answers, but because I want to figure out the answers. I need to change. And I know I lead a congregation of people who also need to change.

One book I found on this subject shared about the pitfalls of living a hurried and busy life all the time. The book is titled, *Addicted to Hurry* by Kirk Byron Jones. And in it he mentions four things that happen when you're in a hurry all the time. When you're in a chronic state of hurry you no longer see clearly, you no longer listen carefully, you no longer think deeply, and you no longer savor life fully. And by the way these things might be worth writing down so I'll repeat them for you. You no longer see clearly, you no longer listen carefully, you no longer think deeply, and you no longer savor life fully.

And I think to that list I would add a couple of other things:

People who are too busy are prone to drift from basic values.

People who are too busy often don't make good decisions.

People who are too busy Struggle with Relationships.

People who are too busy tend to be Spiritually Shallow. I don't say this to be judgmental, just honest. We know from experience that when we are stressed we find it hard to pray. We try to pray but we are unable to concentrate. We find ourselves moving our relationship with God down the priority list so we can attend to the more demanding voices in our heads. Rather than seeing our walk with Christ as the heart and center of our lives, we tend to see it as one more obligation we have to meet.

OK so you should be saying at this point, "OK, OK I get it, I know I know. Busy, hurry, that's not good. Overloaded, over committed, we need to not do that."

Good! I'm glad you get it! Because what I've been trying to do up to this point is convict you. To convict you of sin. You say, "Wow, that's a pretty heavy word to talk about being over committed. Sin?"

Sometimes, here's what I find is I know, and you know, that we need to not live this way it's just that I can't seem to change it. It's like the doctor says, "You need to exercise and eat right."

"Yeah I know that. Thank you, but I'm not doing anything about it. So in my own life I find that when I can begin to think about things theologically and spiritually I find there's a different power that compels me than just the power of knowing the right thing. And so what I've tried to do is help you understand that the way we're living our lives is sinful.

Now sin, the Greek word means, to stray from the path or to miss the mark. We need to know that God has a path or a plan that we're supposed to walk, and when we walk away from it we end up discovering a life that God didn't intend. And that's what we've been doing. We've been walking here and God wants us to go there. And so I wanted you to be convicted of that, and I wanted you to feel it here (head) and here (heart). So that you know intellectually and you know it here in your heart. And that leads to repentance.

So we must repent of our sin but what are we repenting towards? What are we going to do now? And that leads us to our scripture passage we have before us today.

The passage we have first is from the Old Testament. It's from the Ten Commandments. Let's look at it again, where God says to Moses, "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You shall not do any work on the Sabbath." Now this is one of the Ten Commandments and this is part of the answer.

By the way, here's what I find in my life. I find that when I hear this kind of stuff I go, "OK well tell me the answer. What's the answer?" I want a simple answer. Give me one scripture I can memorize and maybe a book to read and then I'm going to change my life." It doesn't work that way though. There are no silver bullets out there. Here's the thing. We know the answers already. The question is just finding the inspiration to just do it. My job today, and this month is to remind you of stuff that you already know. And then my real job is to try to inspire you to actually do something.

So we have this passage in the Ten Commandments, the commandment about the Sabbath. Now the Sabbath is God's rhythm for our lives. And so the word Sabbath in Hebrew it means "to cease, to stop doing something, or to stop working on that day." Now when the Ten Commandments were given no other religion in the near east commanded people to take a day off work. People worked every day, seven days a week. God said, "That is not how I made you to be. I made you to need rest. I made you to stop one day in seven to remember who you are, to rest and to experience renewal."

That's what Sabbath is about, remembering who you are, resting, and experiencing renewal. It's a day to recharge. You've been giving out and giving out and pouring out energy, now you have to take back in. And in that rhythm you can live. So that Jeremiah says, hundreds of years after the Ten Commandments were given, Jeremiah is told by God, "Go stand at the city gates and say to the people, 'Thus says the Lord, for the sake of your lives take care that you do not bear the burden on the Sabbath day, for the sake of your lives observe the Sabbath.'"

So the one day in seven is a part of the rhythm. It's when you remember who you are, you rest and you renew.

How do you do that? Well one of the most important ways is through worship. And sometimes we think, "Well worship is kind of optional. Do I feel like going to church today? Do I not?" Listen this is an important part of what you do to remember who you are, to connect with God, to find energy for your life. It's sort of like plugging in to the recharger so that spiritually you're remembering true north and connecting with God and the power of the Holy Spirit so you find yourself renewed.

If you sit at home and watch talk shows instead of going to church it's not the same. There's something about actually worshipping and connecting with God that's part of the renewal. But that's only one part of Sabbath.

Another part of Sabbath is actually resting. It's not doing, doing. It's stopping from doing. So on the Sabbath we're not meant to do anything that sucks energy out of us. Do that on Saturday. Do that some other time. But on the Sabbath you're actually meant to do the things that renew your soul, that recharge you. That's the way God intended it to be.

Now I want you to remember the Ten Commandments, they weren't suggestions. They were commandments. There are 623 commandments in the Old Testament; God elevates this to the top ten. This is set alongside, "Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not bear false witness. Do not have any other God's before me. And do not violate the Sabbath. Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy."

Now what I'm telling you is that if you're repenting, you're saying, "I'm going to do things differently on the Sabbath. I'm going to observe the Sabbath."

Now beyond that, Jesus taught us that Sabbath isn't just one day in seven; it's also a rhythm in daily life. And we find this is what Jesus does, he hits it hard when he goes out to minister. I mean he's got thousands of people waiting to hear from him, for him to touch them, and preach the gospel, to heal them and cast out the demons and all this. And he does all of that. But then there comes a point where he stops. It's not that there weren't any more people that needed to be ministered to, it's just that Jesus stops and he goes to a quiet place, and we read this again and again in the gospels, where he goes to a lonely place, he goes to a deserted place to pray. He goes there to rest, to renew, and to remember. This is the rhythm of his life.

And he teaches this to his disciples as well. So at one point in Mark's gospel, the disciples had all been sent out by Jesus to do the work of the kingdom. They were preaching and healing and all the things he was doing and then they came back to report to him and this is what happens. We read in our passage from the New Testament, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while. For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat."

You've been like that, where you've worked so fast and so hard you couldn't even stop for lunch. That's where the disciples were. And he says "Now I want you to come away with me." And they went away in a boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Jesus is teaching them there has to be a time when you stop. Do you think they had already ministered to everyone, that there was no one else waiting? Of course there were people waiting. In fact they were still trying to trace out where Jesus and the disciples were going even as they were going here to a quiet place. But Jesus says, "It's OK. I know there are a million more things we could do, but we have to stop and remember who we are and to rest and to renew."

Now this is a very important lesson. You know for most of us the challenge is we've got so many good things we need to be doing. For me here's my challenge. Personally I think you know if we started this new thing here there'd be more people we could minister to. And if we went over here and did this, and if I did this over here, and they're all good things. It's not like I'm trying to decide between watching TV all day and going to do God's work. They're all God's work. It's just that no human being can do all of those things. Jesus didn't. And so somewhere we have to be able to say, "We push hard and then we stop."

And listen, it's not that hurry is always bad. Sometimes you have to be in a hurry. Sometimes there are seasons where you've got to work really hard. We've just here at the church been through December. Advent Festival, and Choir concert, and Spanish service, and candlelight Christmas Eve, followed by Christmas Day on Sunday. And you know it's all hands on deck and we work really hard, but we can't do candlelight Christmas Eve every Sunday. There have to be times of rest, seasons where you stop and remember, you rest and you renew.

So what is the solution to this problem of Overload? The answer is margin. We need margin in our lives.

Margin is the space between our load and our limit. The goal is to build some margin into our lives so we will have time and energy for the things that really matter. Margin is not laziness; it's wisdom. It is planning for the unexpected and guarding what truly matters.

Now how do you get there if most of us are where load is here and power is here, how do we get to where we actually have margin? Well there are two possibilities. One is to take away some of the load. And the other is to do more to recharge ourselves, to rest, renew and recharge. And so that's what we want to do, we want to figure out how we increase our margin by doing less that takes energy and by doing more that replaces energy.

So as I was thinking about this, this year and in this sermon I'm going to invite you to do an anti-resolution resolution. OK, it's the beginning of the year, many of you do New Year's resolutions, "You know I'm going to lose weight." I'm going to exercise more." All that's great. I'm going to ask you not to do more; I'm going to ask you to stop doing as much. So I'm going to ask you to thin out the good stuff your doing in your life.

Wayne Mueller in his book on the Sabbath has this idea. He talks about planting seeds in a garden, like carrots. If you plant carrots you plant seeds and they are tiny little seeds and you sort of sprinkle them like this in the ground. Then you cover them up and then you water them and then you begin to watch them sprout. Pretty soon you have these ferny little carrots about this tall, just the green portion. And then what do you have to do at that point? I mean because they are all just jammed right there all together right in a row. You have to thin them out, don't you? And so you start taking out all of the carrots between every two inches. You leave one carrot every two inches and you pull all the others out. You say, "Wait a minute! Those are good carrots! Why are you pulling them out?" Well because none of the carrots will ever grow to be what they're supposed to be if you keep them all there. What ends up happening is they keep growing and you pull them out when it's time to eat them and you find these scrawny little underdeveloped carrots under the ground because they can't survive with all of those other carrots they're competing against. So you have to thin them out.

Are you following the metaphor here? It's not that there are all kinds of bad stuff you need to stop doing. There's probably a lot of good stuff. But if you keep doing all of it you're not going to do any of it very well. You have to thin. And so we thin and then we look at what are we going to do to renew and recharge.

So here's the first question I want you to write down and I want you to think about it tonight. I don't want you to answer it right now. What one or two good things you've been doing in the last year will you stop doing this year to reduce the load?

Here's the second question. What is it that when I do it it renews me, recharges me that I need to do more of in the coming year?

Now one of the things that I hope renews you is related to your spiritual life. To me renewing me is worship, it's taking time to pray, renewing is just simply sitting in silence for a few minutes and listening for God.

I'm going to invite you to decide what you're going to thin out and what you're going to do more of that will renew, recharge, and reenergize you.

Yesterday I attended the Bi-district Leadership Training. Our keynote speaker said something that really struck me. It hit home. He looked at the audience and said, "All of you are leaders. You are here because you are leaders. You might lead a small group, or a Bible study, or a committee, or ministry in your church. You may be a pastor and lead a congregation." "But," he said, "The most important thing you lead is not a group, or an organization, or an institution. The most important thing you lead is yourself."

So let me ask you this morning, how are you leading yourself? How are you leading your life?

Bottom line, I can't get the all the wasted time back. But I can live differently in the future. And that's what I'm inviting you to do. For us together to recognize that our business and our hurry keeps us from seeing things clearly, listening carefully, thinking deep thoughts and fully savoring our lives. So let's repent of it and follow God's way.

Would you bow in prayer with me? I'd like to invite you to repent. I can't do it for you. I'd for you to simply say quietly under your breath, "Lord forgive me for the business of my life and for missing out on the really important things. Forgive me, God.

Help me to thin out the good things, that I just can't do everything, help me to thin out those things O God that I can let go of this year so that I can more fully live.

Help me to observe Sabbath and rest, Lord, to rest, renew and remember.

I pray that you would help us this year that 2012 might be a different year for many of us. Where we might, by Your power change how we live our lives so that we can see things clearly, listen carefully, think deep thoughts, and fully savor the lives you've given to us. In Jesus name. Amen.