



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“No One Escapes”

Isaiah 40:21-31; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Do you ever have days when it seems you just can get anything done? I don't know about you, but I'm pretty “task-oriented”, and sometimes the phone just won't stop ringing. And then, there are the calls at dinner time—often legitimate (say, from our people who want to be sure to catch me at home), but sometimes those calls are from sales people—and some of those calls come as a pre-recorded message because the company didn't want to spend the money to hire a real person I could hang up on!

Airline flight hardly seems fun anymore. If you get there at the wrong time, or your flight is delayed, the security checkpoints can get jammed up and stand there with your shoes in your hand and stress out with worry over missing your flight. Auto traffic can be worse. Just when you most need to make a smooth trip to arrive at an agreed-upon time for an important meeting, there is an accident—or perhaps nothing more than a CHP officer on the side of the road talking with a driver—and traffic snarls up.

Rick Majerus, men's basketball coach at the University of Utah, recently captured this common concern: “Everyone's worried about the economy this year. Hey, my hairline is in recession, my waistline is in inflation, and altogether, I'm in depression.”

Demands, delays, distractions—they all bring stress. No one escapes. Though we think of Jesus' life as simple compared to ours, it's easy to find instances where even Jesus got snarled up in some human dilemma. We'll look at one of those events today and how Jesus handled it, and that will give us ideas for bringing more of the grace of God into our lives—we, who carry the name, “Christian”.

Open your Bibles to Mark's gospel, the first chapter, and find verse 29. Mark, you know, is the “Readers Digest” of gospels. In the first chapter, we meet John the Baptizer pointing to Jesus, Jesus undergoes a tough initiation by the tempter, he calls his first disciples, preaches his first messages, heals and does miracles. Today's part includes—at last—an opportunity for Jesus to get a rest. Listen with me for God's Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud.

[text]

This man Jesus must be tired--and it's just chapter one of this gospel! He tries to get off by himself with God to pray, but his new disciples come running after him. They way I read this is, his disciples had been as impressed as anyone in the crowd about Jesus' ministries—now healing the mother of Peter's wife, and then conducts a long session of deliverance ministry, driving demons out of people whose lives were being ruined by these spirits. (Today we have our healing ministry at the end of worship, where you may come for Jesus' healing for yourself, or another.) The disciples also noticed how impressed others were with Jesus. So they want him

to show up again in the same town, and build on his success from the previous day: “You wouldn’t want to disappoint all those people, would you, Master?”

But Jesus is not interested. He gently rejects their request. “Let’s go to some other towns,” he says, “for I’m here to preach the gospel all over the place.” Clearly, though Jesus does the spectacular regularly, that’s not the main thing for him. The purpose of his healings and deliverance from evil spirits is simply to demonstrate the powerful truth of the Kingdom of God, and to call people to transfer their citizenship to that kingdom, and live as full citizens of that King.

The picture I created for today is an attempt to portray someone who is facing a lot of pressures—and maybe that’s you. You have many demands on your time. You have appointments, job interviews, whatever. The delays and demands and distractions really can interfere with accomplishing those things you want to—or feel you have to—accomplish. And that’s stressful.

Let’s hear from one of Jesus’ followers, who became a traveling preacher for Jesus—I’m talking about the Apostle Paul, whose letters to his churches fill so much of our New Testament. Find Paul’s First Corinthian letter, and then find chapter 9, starting with verse 16. In this passage, Paul lays out the urgent priority on preaching, too. Listen for God’s voice in this passage.

[text]

Perhaps you are catching on to how both Paul and Jesus handled the stress of many delays, demands and distractions: both of these men had a firm grasp on what was most important in life, as God had called them (in their cases) to preach. Paul was so wedded to reaching people for Jesus that he focused solely on the person or people he was with, and identified with them—whether they were Jews (“under the law”) or Gentiles (“not having the law”). He would become humble and weak when he was working with people on the bottom of the social pile. He would use his hard-earned status as a highly-educated Jew with Roman citizenship when he was in elite circles. Not focusing on himself, he was willing (as he wrote) “to become ALL things to ALL people so that by ALL possible means I might save some.” Now, that’s clear purpose, Paul’s call from God.

Our text from Isaiah 40 brings us God’s Word, too. God is addressing the belief of the people of Israel in that time that God is not really concerned about them and their little problems. (You also hear people in the church say this, sometimes.) But nothing could be farther from the truth. The truth is, God IS engaged in our lives. “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths [on their own] grow tired and weary, and young men [on their own] stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” [Nor will they lose time and effectiveness by delays, competing demands, or distractions!]

You can grasp this, can’t you? The first priority—before you think about your life task—is to connect and remain connected with the God who is unchanging in His love for His people. No one escapes the pressure of delays, competing demands, and distractions. But with our connection with God and God’s call to clear priorities, we can deal with the small stuff of life,

and look for ways to turn any of these pressures into pushes forward on the priorities God has given us.

Philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard wrote, “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” Jesus put it this way—“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

God has led our church to identify our “one thing”—“to passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ and radiate that love to everyone”. We do this by making disciples who make disciples of Jesus. We do this by creating a healthy church where people can heal and grow toward effective ministry. We do this by making an impact in our community so people want to find out more about us. We do this by expanding opportunities to connect with healthy churches by helping start more new congregations. Those four “strategies” we call “mission statements”, and they are ways we have grasped that God wants us to love Jesus and radiate his love to everyone.

Have you discovered your “one thing”? Do you find yourself knocked off course and irritated immensely by the delays, demands and distractions of life? Then lay hold of your “one thing” by laying hold of God. Let nothing get in your way. Be ruthless about this. Neither rain, nor snow, nor dark of night—like the Post Office’s motto—will prevent you from spending time with God, to listen, to learn, and to love. . . .

May God grant you the balance that comes from standing on a firm foundation—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose Spirit is ready to live in you.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on February 8, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]