

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, February 23, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

Don't Just Do Something--Sit There!

Transfiguration

"Don't just stand there; do something!"

A familiar and urgent command designed to spur us on out of complacency into action!

Peter essentially barks out this command in response to witnessing the induction of Jesus into the faith heroes hall of fame by virtue of his appearance on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, not to mention his glowing transfiguration.

Overwhelmed and awed by the whole event, Peter did what most of us do in pivotal and poignant moments: *carpe diem!* Seize the day! Capture the moment!

Let's make some dwellings; let's make it a Kodak moment, preserve it for all posterity. Let's get to work! C'mon, guys, get the stuff we need to make a dwelling—boards, hammers, nails. James, John, don't just stand there with your mouths hanging open! Get busy! Do something! Busy! Busy! Do this! Do that! Got to get to work! Produce! Achieve!

It's built into the very fabric of our culture, even our religion--the Protestant work ethic and all that. And yet, it's the source of a common lament I hear from parishioners and colleagues alike. We're *tired*, of thinking that our identity is based on accomplishment; and if we don't *accomplish* anything, then we don't know who we are.

Get on an airplane and strike up a conversation; and after exchanging names and where we're from, the next thing we want to know is, "*What do you do?*" Our doing is who we are.

So Peter's insistence on *doing* something is completely natural; but God's voice from heaven interrupts his babbling to say, "*Hush! This is my son, the beloved! Listen to him!*" Did you get that, Peter? Quit talking and doing, and for once in your life, simply pay attention. Listen!

Sure, Christ's call to discipleship issues forth in all sorts of doing, but only as our *response* and not as *condition* for our identity as God's precious children. This identity comes only as gift, pure grace, free and undeserved. Yet we've all but forgotten, or heaven forbid, never even known, simply how to "be."

The Rev. Dr. Timothy Smith

What's the most popular hardback book besides the Bible ever sold in North America?

The Purpose-Driven Life! – Rick Warren – Saddleback Church.

We want to know above all else what we're supposed to do, and surely there's a time and place for that.

But we get so action-oriented that we often fail, like Peter, to be contemplative, spiritual, grounded and centered in the essential reality of God's presence in our lives, simply to stand before and in awe of the mystery of God *so that* our doing can be meaningful, purposeful, and sustainable.

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HENRI NOUWEN - his book – spiritual renewal - *Out of Solitude*.

Nouwen writes:

In solitude we become aware that our worth is not the same as our usefulness.

STORY:

A carpenter and his apprentice were walking together through a large forest. And when they came across a tall, huge, gnarled, old, beautiful oak tree, the carpenter asked his apprentice:

"Do you know why this tree is so tall, so huge, so gnarled, so old and beautiful?" The apprentice looked at his master and said: "No . . . why?" "Well," the carpenter said, "because it is useless.

If it had been useful it would have been cut long ago and made into tables and chairs, but because it is useless it could grow so tall and so beautiful that you can sit in its shade and relax."

Nouwen goes on:

In solitude we can grow old freely without being preoccupied with our usefulness and we can offer a service which we had not planned on.

To the degree that we have lost our dependencies on this world, whatever world means:

- father, mother, children, career, success or rewards

- we can form a community of faith in which there is little to defend but much to share.

Because as a community of faith, we take the world seriously but never too seriously. In such a community we can adopt a little of the mentality of Pope John, who could laugh at himself. When a highly decorated official asked him, "*Holy father, how many people work in the Vatican?*" he paused a moment then replied, "*Oh, about half of them I suppose.*" The trick, as in most things, is *balance*.

Knowing when to "*do*" and when and how to just "*be*." Learning to take our calling and our work seriously, but not too seriously!

To let go of our needs to control, to listen for the voice of God so that our actions aren't merely the proverbial running around like a chicken with its head cut off but, instead, are true acts of discipleship that flow from a *being* that is formed in the awe and wonder of God's gracious love for us.

WALKING PATHS ON WEDNESDAY

Marg prepares a devotion, we talk, we walk, we pray.

One day a couple of years ago – talking about being quiet - When we retire – we have time to do some soul-searching – literally. No job, no kids, no distractions, no busyness – time to work on ourselves. Opportunity to look inside ourselves – examine our relationship w/God. Sounds great – but there is the risk that you will discover something about yourself, and about God.

If I ever get quiet and contemplate where God is moving in my life and what God might be calling me to do, then I might have to deal with that, and it might not be exactly what I want, what I have planned. It just might be something calling me outside of my comfort zone. I'm not afraid in the stillness that God won't speak to me. Oh no, *I'm afraid that God will.*

Enter Peter on the mountain. He wants to get busy with his own agenda because he surely doesn't like the agenda Jesus has just introduced with the whole "take up your cross" thing. But the voice from heaven persists: "*This is my son, the beloved...listen to him!*" - the same voice that beckons to us as we stand on the verge of this journey into the season of Lent, into suffering, to the cross, for which this transfiguration is intended to prepare Jesus, the disciples, and us.

Lent, which begins this coming Wednesday, calls us to rediscover our spirituality,

- to be,
- to quit our frantic babbling, and to pay attention,
- to consider who we are - God's precious children, forgiven, loved, held, and only from that identity - are we gifted and called and sent to do God's work in the world.

If we don't get the "*being*" part, then the *doing* will only be chaotic, frustrated attempts at self-justification - or else grounded in fear and devoid of any joy. If all your doing seems madness and pointless, learn again to behold the mystery, to enter a quiet place of awe and wonder.

There will be more than ample opportunity and inspiration for living our call to discipleship, to take up the cross of Christ. But in order to be able to do that, at least for now, don't just do something! *Sit* there!

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST, AND SPIRIT.... Amen.