

## 1 Sermon, June 2, 2013

Texts: Job 4:12-21, 1 Kings 19:9-16

Title: "Finding the Sacred"

1. In our distracted lives, where do we find the sacred?
2. In undivided time
3. In facing our fear

### 1. In our distracted lives, where do we find the sacred?

We live in a secular age.

People believe in God, but they often believe more in shopping, or big portions or Elvis.

I could whine about this secular age, or blame this or that for declining church attendance,

I could blame various social factors, and whine and gripe about the situation. But that won't help anyone. So I'm not going to try to explain our secular age.

What I *do* want to do today is talk about how we can each set aside the secular, and put more sacred back into our lives.

There are two ways I believe we can find the sacred. They are both difficult. But if we stick with them, we will find our whole way of seeing and hearing changes.

These two things are:

First, undivided time.

Second, facing our fear.

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### 2. undivided time

Undivided time.

When, recently, were you engaged in something without distraction?

In recent weeks, I've been out in the garden. And when I was planting seeds and covering them with dirt, I wasn't thinking about anything else. I was totally focused on what I was doing. When I was putting tomato plants in the ground, I was unaware of the world around me. Only when I finished watering the transplant did I really think about other things.

Yesterday I went to a family gathering for my mother's birthday. Before I went, I wrote her a card. When I was writing that card, I was really only thinking of my Mom, and who she is and how she's cared for me and all those around her. My time was undivided.

Tomorrow, I plan to see my granddaughter for the first time. I expect that when I hold her, I won't be thinking about anything else. My time will be undivided.

There's a scene in the Pixar movie "Up," in which the dog hero of the movie wears a collar that speaks his thoughts.

The collar speaks for Dug, "My master is good and smart, he made me this collar so I may talk. Squirrel!"

We get distracted like that.

In fact, we like distraction! I can't think of any other reason for grocery stores bigger than football fields – we don't need that much variety. We just like *seeing* that much variety. It makes grocery shopping a kind of adventure.

So much of our culture these days is about distraction. Some people blame Sesame Street for shortening the attention of children. I don't think you can blame any one thing. But if you compare the television of today with the television of 25 years ago, it is amazing how much more fast-paced it is. It is built around interruptions, and not just for the commercials.

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If we want to find the sacred, we need some time that is uninterrupted, undivided.

Prayer is essentially undivided time – time when we focus on one thing – God. That's why prayer is difficult. It's easier to focus on one thing if the object of our focus is a living thing like a tomato plant or a baby. It's harder to focus on just one thing when it is God, who is so huge and hard for our minds to grasp.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote a poem that I want to share with you that talks about undivided time, or undivided will.

It is here translated from the original Danish:

Father in Heaven, what are we without you?  
What is all that we know, vast accumulation though it be,  
But a chipped fragment if we do not know you?  
What is all our striving?  
Could it ever encompass a world,  
But a half-finished work  
If we do not know you?  
You, the One who is one thing and who is all.  
So may you give  
To the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing  
To the heart, sincerity to receive this and this only  
To the will, purity that wills only one thing  
In prosperity, may you grant perseverance to will one thing  
Amid distraction, collectedness to will one thing  
In suffering, patience to will one thing.

You that gives both the beginning and the completion  
May you early, at the dawn of the day,  
Give to the young the resolution to will one thing  
As the day wanes, may you give to the old  
A renewed remembrance of that first resolution  
That the first may be like the last  
And the last like the first  
In possession of a life that has willed only one thing,  
To know God.

Translated from the Danish  
Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing

Undivided time is difficult for me.

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LaTisha. I'm a 21 college senior studying sociology and African American studies. I'm from Ypsilanti, Michigan. I really love Jesus! And I truly love people.

Fully Present: Undivided Attention

Recently I reread an article I really like called "7 Things Highly Productive People Do." It began,

"You probably don't want to admit it but you love distractions. In fact, just like monkeys, you get a shot of dopamine every time something pulls you in another direction. Why do you think you check your email so much? Want to be more productive and get your focus back? There are no secret tricks here... do one thing at a time. Stop multitasking—it's just another form of distraction." (emphasis added) Easier said than done, I know.

This rings so true for our everyday lives including our spiritual lives. We read our Bibles and study the Word but our minds wander to those to-do lists or the game. We sit in church but we text or tweet every five minutes. We pray but as soon as our phone just lights up, we abruptly stop the conversation with God. Not long ago I was praying I heard God say, "I'm here. (You) Be fully here." We have to be fully present when we meet with Him, making Him our sole focus, our number one priority.

I am not certainly not the judge but I would guess that most people do not spend enough time with God if they're going to have the real, thriving relationship that He and (hopefully) we desire. I wonder what would happen, though, if when we put time into our relationship with God, we gave Him our undivided attention. Imagine how much more we would get out of that time if we were completely focused on God, rather than slightly (or very) distracted. I've learned that we have to do whatever it takes for all the time we set aside with Him to STOP completely, quiet ourselves (our racing and distracted minds and lives), and give Him time that is completely devoted to Him. If we gave Him all of our focus for the time we pray, read our Bibles, praise, and worship, I believe He can do so much more than if we're multitasking, distracted, and sorta focused. Pastor Joel Urshan explained in a sermon I heard recently that it is so easy to get distracted with clutter, carnal stuff, or everyday things to do that we end up going through a routine, ritual, or obligation rather than deeply connecting with God! And sometimes we just rob God of that time completely. Neither is okay! He has so much more for us! God wants time with us and He wants that time must be fully His.

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I'm learning how to treat that daily time as sacred, consecrated unto Him, and it is so wonderfully rewarding. If email has to be closed, facebook logged out, and phone put on silent, then that is what we have to do to get the most in our time with God. Stuff can be taken care of later! The world will not stop. There is a reason Jesus so often got away, leaving the crowd, the noise, the busyness to pray alone (often early in the morning), completely focused on His Father (Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:15-16; Mark 1:35; Mark 6:45-46). I believe God wants all of us, particularly in the time we have with Him. It's time to be fully present and give Him and get the most in our time together. There's so much He wants to tell, do, teach, and show us there as we seek and find Him. Just like in class, don't miss it because you refused to give Him your undivided attention.

### 3. In facing our fear

Many of us fear prayer, or fear being alone with ourselves.

Many of us fear the scripture.

3) Gandhi, spiritual/political leader: "The enemy is fear. We think it is hate; but, it is fear."

4) Winston Churchill, UK politician, statesman; former British Prime Minister: "When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened."

5) Judy Blume, author: "Each of us must confront our own fears, must come face to face with them. How we handle our fears will determine where we go with the rest of our lives. To experience adventure or to be limited by the fear of it."

6) Don Miguel Ruiz, author, speaker, Shaman: Death is not the biggest fear we have; our biggest fear is taking the risk to be alive—the risk to be alive and express what we really are."

7) Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist, poet, philosopher: "When a resolute young fellow steps up to the great bully, the world, and takes him boldly by the beard, he is often surprised to find it comes off in his hand, and that it was only tied on to scare away the timid adventurers."

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Your fears (other than those of immediate danger) are basically threats to your hearts deepest desires: to be loved, to be known, and to be part of something greater than yourself.

Job 4:12-21

The Message (MSG)

"A word came to me in secret— a mere whisper of a word, but I heard it clearly. It came in a scary dream one night, after I had fallen into a deep, deep sleep. Dread stared me in the face, and Terror. I was scared to death—I shook from head to foot. A spirit glided right in front of me— the hair on my head stood on end. I couldn't tell what it was that appeared there— a blur . . . and then I heard a muffled voice:

"How can mere mortals be more righteous than God? How can humans be purer than their Creator? Why, God doesn't even trust his own servants, doesn't even cheer his angels, So how much less these bodies composed of mud, fragile as moths? These bodies of ours are here today and gone tomorrow, and no one even notices—gone without a trace. When the tent stakes are ripped up, the tent collapses— we die and are never the wiser for having lived."

Job 4:12-21

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

A secret was told to me in a faint whisper—

I was overcome by sleep, but disturbed by dreams;

I trembled with fear,

and my hair stood on end, as a wind blew past my face.

It stopped and stood still. Then a form appeared— a shapeless

form. And from the silence, I heard a voice say,

"No humans are innocent in the eyes of God their Creator.

He finds fault with his servants and even with his angels.

Humans are formed from clay and are fragile as moths, so what chance do you have?

Born after daybreak, you die before nightfall and disappear forever.

Your tent pegs are pulled up, and you leave this life, having gained no wisdom."

1 Kings 19:9-16

Common English Bible (CEB)

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**9** There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The Lord's word came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

**10** Elijah replied, "I've been very passionate for the Lord God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!"

**11** The Lord said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. **12** After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. **13** When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

**14** He said, "I've been very passionate for the Lord God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too."

**15** The Lord said to him, "Go back through the desert to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. **16** Also anoint Jehu, Nimshi's son, as king of Israel; and anoint Elisha from Abel-meholah, Shaphat's son, to succeed you as prophet.

1 Kings 19:9-18

The Message (MSG)

**8-9** He got up, ate and drank his fill, and set out. Nourished by that meal, he walked forty days and nights, all the way to the mountain of God, to Horeb. When he got there, he crawled into a cave and went to sleep.

Then the word of God came to him: "So Elijah, what are you doing here?"

**10** "I've been working my heart out for the God-of-the-Angel-Armies," said Elijah. "The people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed the places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me."

**11-12** Then he was told, "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by."

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

**13-14** When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there. A quiet voice asked, "So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing

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here?" Elijah said it again, "I've been working my heart out for God, the God-of-the-Angel-Armies, because the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed your places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me."

**15-18** God said, "Go back the way you came through the desert to Damascus. When you get there anoint Hazael; make him king over Aram. Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi; make him king over Israel. Finally, anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Anyone who escapes death by Hazael will be killed by Jehu; and anyone who escapes death by Jehu will be killed by Elisha. Meanwhile, I'm preserving for myself seven thousand souls: the knees that haven't bowed to the god Baal, the mouths that haven't kissed his image."