

Sermon:

Does it seem to you as though this has been
a busier than usual winter or spring?

I know there is a usual ebb and flow
to the church year,
that there are some seasons
that are busier than others,
but somehow this one seems busier.

I also know that if it is busy,
I have no one but myself to blame.

There is no one but me
who is in charge of my schedule.

I remember I one of my first years of ministry,
Commenting to one of my elders,
Who was also a good friend,
that I was going to be working late at the church
on Saturday night again finishing the sermon.

I remember the conversation,
because of how mad I got.

He looked at me and said,
"If you are working late Saturday night,
That is your choice...
that is your fault.

No one sets your schedule but you."

That had been a busy week as well,
And I remember looking at him and saying,
"So what should I stop doing?

Should I do less visiting?"

What I was also thinking was,

"Should we not have
a Session meeting next month?"

Should I postpone the next funeral
until it is more convenient for me?

Perhaps I wont preach this week?"

With all sincerity he looked at me and said,

"No one expects you to work night and day.

Do what you can in the time you have,
And look after yourself."

Shortly after that he renamed his sailboat,
"Pastoral Care"
and on windy summer afternoons,
he would call me up and say,
"Doug, I think we need some pastoral care"

Of course I remember his words
because he was right.
Most of us are our own worst enemies
when it comes to managing our time.
We seem to take on more and more things,
Thinking we can get it all done,
And then we find ourselves
in the middle of a whirlwind of activity
without even a moment to think.

Have you ever had a week like that?
One of those weeks
that it feels like you are standing
in the middle of a whirlwind.
Or that feeling of getting off a pair
of skates or skis, and feeling like the ground
is still moving under your feet.

“What are you doing here?”
God asked Elijah after the whirlwind,
And the moving earth,
And the all consuming fire.
What are you doing here?
What are we doing here?
The busyness of life can often get in the way
of asking that question can't it.
What are we doing here?
Is it all just busyness amounting to nothing,
Or is there a real purpose to our existence?
Who has the time to sit around thinking about that?
There are meetings to get to,
people to see,
classes to attend and teach.
There are really important things to do,
who has time to sit
and think about questions like that?

The whirlwind that is life,
the treadmill that moves under our feet,
the fire that burns on and on,
consuming what is around it.
These are the things of our life.
This is the busyness of our lives.

Who has time to sit and wait
for answers that might not come?
It is so much easier to pay attention to the whirlwind,
It is so much safer to be occupied
with the earth that is moving under our feet.
It is so much easier to be overwhelmed
with the busyness and the efficiency of life,
than it is to be still and ask the big questions
like what am I doing here.

Because if we let go of the busyness
that occupies us,
isn't there a chance
that maybe there is nothing left in the stillness
and the silence that remains.

We are told that God was not in the whirlwind,
or the earthquake,
or the fire that passed by Elijah.

But God was in the sheer silence,
in the quiet whisper,
or as the ancient Hebrew puts it,
"In a sound of a gentle stillness."

A gentle stillness.

A stillness so still, that it can be heard.

That, in the end,
is how Elijah heard the mighty voice of God.

In a gentle stillness.

In the busyness that is our lives,
who has the time or the patience for that?

There are really important things to do,
who has time to sit

and wait on the gentle stillness?

And yet that is often how God's voice
is most powerfully heard,
in the gentle stillness.

For me, camping is about that gentle stillness.

It has been since I was a young child,

And my parents gave me the gift

Of taking me camping with them.

First at camp Kanawin out west and then,

By the time I was Sam's age,

Up at Gracefield.
And I began to know the stillness,
Of canoeing on a misty lake
in the early morning.
And I learned to listen to wind in the trees.

And then in their wisdom
my parents took me to Presbyterian Music Camp
where I met some of the best friends
of my life.

And where I learned what it means
to be in a Christian community,
and what it means to stay up all night,
and talk to people like me who
like the story of Elijah
were asking the question,
“What am I doing here?”

And also where I met a young girl named Pam,
who would eventually,
many years later, agreed to go out with me.

And it was back at Gracefield
and other church camps,
where in the stillness star lit nights,
I first heard God’s call to ministry,
where I questioned God’s call,
and eventually accepted
God’s call to be a minister.

For me, camping is about that gentle stillness.
It is canoeing on a misty lake in the early morning.
Sitting by a crackling fire
under a blanketed of twinkling stars.
Lying in a hammock
on a breezy summer afternoon.
that I have heard God’s gentle quiet voice...

But who has time?
Who has time to sit around and wait
for the voice of God in the gentle stillness?
No one has time for that anymore,
But blessed are those who find the time,
Blessed are those who make the time,
Blessed are those who set aside the time.

In the busyness of life,
with so much going on every minute of every day
my prayer for you and for myself,
Is for gentle stillness in these summer months.
May we find time...
No, may we make the time this summer
for gentle stillness.
May we all find the time
to ask God to speak to us in that stillness.
And may we be rewarded with an awareness
of God's power and strength,
so strong that it can speak to us
through gentle stillness of silence.
In the name of the Father, and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit, AMEN.