

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
Last Epiphany; Feb. 26, 2017

Living in the Moment

Show of hands (and don't worry, I promise not to call on anybody)... How many of you feel like you spend too much time dwelling on the past? Okay, now the opposite question. How many feel like you spend too much time worrying about the future? That's me. I'm a future worrier. Now, how many feel like you truly live in the present? Not as many hands. Living in the present is a real challenge for many of us, and unfortunately, it's only getting harder. More on that in a minute.

But first, it might help to know that this is not a new challenge. It was a challenge for Jesus and his disciples, and we see it in today's gospel. It's the story of the transfiguration, the story of Jesus ascending the mountaintop with Peter and James and John. Jesus did this from time to time – left the crowd behind in order to find space for prayer and rest. But this time, something magical happens. They get to the mountaintop and Jesus is transformed; his clothes are dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear, and God's voice comes down from heaven. It's an amazing moment that does two things: it connects Jesus to the past, to the great prophets of old; and it foreshadows the future, with a glimpse of his resurrection and ascension.

It must have been tempting to Jesus to get wrapped up in those visions. It's certainly tempting to his disciples, because they want to build dwellings and stay there. But Jesus knows that the visions are just that – visions. They are not the present moment, they are not the focus of his mission. His moment, and his mission, is down in the valley.

Two things are important about this. First, Jesus knows that he needs to retreat. He knows he needs to find that place of rest – if only for a moment. But he does so in order to engage more fully in the present. It's not that he ignores the past or the future – they're there and they're important. But most important is living in the present because Jesus knows that God's spirit is alive in him, and that God's dream is unfolding through his life.

This week begins the season of Lent, and our focus this year is on cultivating our capacity to experience the presence of God and to live in the moment. We lead such distracted lives, many of us balancing work and family, juggling hurts from the past and worries about the future. On top of that, we are bombarded by a constant stream of information – on the internet, on television, on our phones. Linda Stone, the former tech executive who I've quoted before, says that all these inputs have a profound impact on us. We have learned to pay continuous partial attention, always shifting from one task, one idea, one person to the next. And that's why it's getting harder to live in the present, because even when we try we find there's a sort of hyper-present; the moment is gone as soon as it arrives.

Now don't get me wrong. Information technology is not all bad. It's great in many ways. It helps us stay in touch with family and friends, keeps us informed and engaged, aids our health and safety and productivity. But there's no question that living in this age of distraction takes a toll. We are more connected than ever in some ways, and yet more disconnected at the same time. We see that in the political and cultural divides in our country, and we see it in our own homes, where family time seems so elusive.

Our Lenten program this year is designed to help us think about these challenges, and reflect together on how the church can respond. Our faith is fundamentally grounded in relationships. That's what it's all about – God loving us enough to send God's own son to be in relationship with us, and to show us how to love each other. And that wasn't just a one-time thing. God still longs to be in relationship with us. God's Spirit is alive today, knocking on the door of our hearts if only we are still long enough to listen.

So that's going to be our focus this Lent. We're going to talk about ways to unplug and live in the moment, ways to practice sabbath in our fast-paced world, ways to go deeper in our relationships with God and with each other, so that like Jesus we can renew our mission in the world around us. There are brochures in your bulletins that describe these programs, and stay tuned for more information on a Summer of Connection that will feature group opportunities to experiment together. [And one sidenote: if you are the rare person who does live in the moment and who is not distracted in this digital age – either because of your stage in life or your spiritual practice – you are not off the hook! We need you to participate and teach the rest of us your secret.]

In closing, let me offer some wise words from Anne Lamott. She points out that most anything will start working again if you unplug it for a few minutes, and that includes us. It's true for us as individuals and as a community. It is so important to give God the space to work God's magic in our lives. I hope that you'll join us on that adventure in the months ahead. Perhaps we will find that we too are transfigured and transformed. Amen.