

**“Hold That Twitter!”**  
**Text: Exodus 20:8-11; John 14:25-30**  
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**August 23, 2009**

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

*John 14:27*

For those of you who may have just landed in a spaceship from another planet, a bit of explanation might be necessary regarding the word “Twitter.” It is a word that has been used for centuries in the English language as a verb describing what birds do when they make sounds - The birds “twittered” in the trees. It has been used as a noun naming a state of excitement or agitation, as in - The bride was really in a “twitter” just before the wedding. But recently the word has acquired a new meaning as in – “I’ll twitter u, if u twitter me back.” Now, if you can picture those words in your mind, the “you” is not spelled “y-o-u,” but just “u”. Twittering in this sense involves sending abbreviated messages via cell phones, blackberries, or other hand-held electronic devices. Forty-five million Americans are twittering every day. Everyone from President Obama to Oprah Winfrey, to Shaquille O’Neal is twittering. (1) So is Senator Claire McCaskill from Missouri. Every day, she has a twitter conversation with her constituents. One of her twitters read this way: “[I like] old-style, crunchy tacos, a Chicken Burrito Supreme, and Diet Coke at Taco Bell. ...Okay, brain freeze. I know you can only get Diet Pepsi at Taco Bell.” (2) It is a frightening thing that one of our senators felt it necessary to send either the first or the second message. I’m glad members of Congress are in communication, but if I were from Missouri, I would wish that she had held that twitter and instead spent her time trying to figure out how to untangle healthcare. One other congressional twitterer – I’ll be through with this in a minute – is Representative Darrell Issa from California. Just last month he twittered to his constituents, “Back from Belgium. They make quite a waffle.” (3) OK, just one more thing. The chairman of the Department of Religion, I kid you not, at Boston University, David Prothero has starting using Twitter to create short descriptions of each world religion. He summarizes Islam this way: “Allah told Gabriel, told the Prophet Mohammed, just one God. Pray to him five times a day; give alms; hajj to Mecca. Submit! Ah!” Here is the professor’s definition of atheism: “There is no uknowwho, but Freud, and Marx is his prophet.” (4)

A few weeks ago the Twitter network went down, I understand, and it was a real nuisance to people who depend, for various reasons, their work, primarily, on this means of communication. But for others, a few days without tweeting or twittering opened up new possibilities. One glad lady said, “I went for a walk. I did some

writing. I even baked a cake,” as if she had discovered that those things were real possibilities in life for the first time. (5)

I'm actually all for any means of communication, any way we can be helped in our connecting with one another. I'm all for up-to-the-minute communication. One only needs to think of recent events in Iran and those massive demonstrations against election fraud, which would've been impossible without cell phones and text messaging and the rest. But sometimes the question really does arise - Can we be too much in touch? Or, to put it another way, can we be so electronically in touch that we have diminished interest in being in contact, flesh-to-flesh, person-to-person, eyeball-to-eyeball with other people? To be aware of our own inner selves and wants and needs? To know who our neighbors are who live literally on our block or down the street? In our frantic text messaging, are we communicating things that are really not important, and failing to communicate with the God who rules over all?

Week before last, I was traveling in a part of Virginia in which I could neither send nor receive e-mails. My cell phone wouldn't work. I was in a state of frustration for at least two days. But gradually, I found myself listening to the birds – yes – birds twittering in the morning. I looked at awe upon the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains. I felt the refreshing, cool, clean air of North Carolina. I spent most of one day admiring the handiwork of sculptors and potters, weavers and painters at the Penland School of Crafts. I thought of that commandment found in the 46th Psalm - *Be still and know that I am God*, and I realized how regularly I failed to obey that commandment.

I have kept a favorite prayer over the years written by Michael Quoist, a wonderful French Catholic priest, entitled “Lord, I Have Time.”

“I went out Lord,  
People were coming and going  
Walking and running.  
Everything was rushing: cars, trucks, the street, the whole town. People  
were rushing not to waste time.  
They were rushing after time,  
To catch up with time,  
to gain time.

“Good –bye, Sir, excuse me, I haven't time.  
I'll come back, I can't wait. I haven't time.  
I must end this letter, I haven't time.  
I'd love to help you, but I haven't time.  
I can't accept, having no time.  
I can't think. I can't read; I am swamped. I haven't time.  
I'd like to pray, but I haven't time.

“Lord, you have made a big mistake in your calculations.  
There is a big mistake somewhere.  
The hours are too short,  
The days are too short,  
Our lives are too short.”

Is it God's fault? Or is it that we have packed our days so tightly that we have lost the real connections that count? We have run around so much that we need to be commanded to be still. Our culture demands the opposite of stillness, and too often we listen to the demands of the outside world. We keep hurrying and multi-tasking, twittering and blogging, and we lose the meaning of every present moment. We compromise our capacity to step back and take the long view, to get clear again about what matters and what doesn't.

I have saved for a long time a little snippet of a conversation between Ralph McGill, the late, great editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* and the poet Carl Sandburg. They were taking a walk down the road near Sandburg's home in Hendersonville, North Carolina. In the shadow of Glassy Mountain, Sandburg confessed to McGill, “I often walk here to be alone, and then I sit and look at this silent hill, and I ask myself, ‘Who are you, Carl? Where are you going?’ Time is the coin of your life. Are you letting someone else spend it for you?”

Among the ways our faith tradition blesses us most profoundly is that it regularly reminds us that we do not make the world go ‘round. Sunday comes, and if we are smart, we stop what we are doing. We come to church; we enter the sanctuary, a place set aside for our spirits to catch up with our bodies and for God to catch up with us. Of course even here, it's hard to get completely untangled. Even though we ask that cell phones be turned off, hardly a worship service passes without at least one melodious ring. One or two of you have watches with alarms on them. Perhaps you haven't noticed, but I have. At least one of your alarms strikes right at noon. I am proud to say I've never been in the middle of my sermon when that alarm has gone off.

In a world of overload, it is a gift to yourself to be unavailable to the demands of life. It is not good for you, or for me, to be always on. One spiritual discipline I would gently suggest is that when you sit quietly while Walter is playing the prelude or the choir is singing the anthem, or Chris or I are preaching, avoid the tendency to log on to your mental e-mail box. Before you know it, you have started sorting through the messages stored there: *After church I need to remember to call Mother. Don't forget to...* (6)

This kind of thing is just endemic now to who we are, and it takes discipline to reclaim our lives.

In his new book *An Attentive Life*, Leighton Ford tells of a pastor, who when he was a teenager, decided that he was going to leave behind his faith and leave behind church, and just go on his merry way. During his senior year, he found

himself converted back to Christianity in the oddest way. This young man was attending a play about Galileo, who himself had had troubles with the church of his day. The pastor says, "I had gone to the play to get extra credit for my physics course. But my life changed that night. After watching the play, I realized I am not the center of the universe." (7)

"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy," said the Lord. That is the time-tested way of reminding us that we are not the center of the universe. If you listen carefully to the passage from Exodus, you will see that the seventh day of resting was not after creation, but was rather a part of the creation process. On the day of rest, creation was actually finished.

The Sabbath Day is intended to help us creatures stop, be still, and remember that God is God and that we are not here to take up all the room in the universe.

I like the story about the artist from Asia, who was commissioned by a Westerner to paint a picture. When the picture was complete, over in the left hand corner of the canvas was a blossoming cherry tree with a small bird sitting on one of its branches. The rest of the canvas was a vast, white space. The American said, "Why didn't you fill up the canvas? I'm paying you good money!"

The artist refused, saying, "Sir, if I do that, there will be no room for the bird to fly."

If our lives are so full of what we do, what we do, then there is little room for reliance on what God can do with us.

If God could take a break, then certainly we can. It is the primary way we keep our lives straight and stay human and humble before our mighty and majestic Creator.

I think of the wisdom of the writer of Ecclesiastes. *Better is one hand full of quietness than two hands full of toil, striving after the wind.* The incredible promise of our faith is that God loves us as we are. We do not have to justify our existence or earn God's love, or our own worth. All that comes with the package, comes with the package of being a part of God's good creation.

I was over at Borders the other day and sitting right by the cash register was *The Little Red Hen* - you know the book? I had not read that in years, but the plot is something like this: The industrious hen is always on the move. The rest of the animals in the barnyard are just lying around being lazy. She finds a grain of wheat; she plants it, harvests the wheat, grinds the wheat, makes a loaf of bread. When the other animals smell the bread, when it's ready, they all want a piece. But instead, they get a lecture on how, when there is bread to be baked, they shouldn't loaf on the job. (Please pardon the pun.) *The Little Red Hen* is a great moral tale, but it doesn't tell the whole truth. Industry is wonderful. Being active, being passionate about what you do is fabulous, but the commandment to

observe Sabbath in one way or another is not an invitation to sloth. It is an antidote to idolatry, the idolatry that tells us that the Earth is ours, the world is ours; our lives are ours. That's a lie. The truth is "that in life and in death, we belong to God."

The bottom line of what I'm trying to say today is that if God is not a workaholic, then neither ought we to be.

When Jesus' work on earth was about to be done, he told his beloved disciples important things that they would need to know when he was no longer with them in the flesh. He had no material goods to bequeath to them. You remember how his crucifixion squad, after they nailed him to the cross, divided up his few clothes and belongings right there in front of God and everybody. He had nothing material to leave. But what he bequeathed to those he loved was his peace, a peace that had come to him from God, and now would flow from him to them, and through them to future generations. *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*

Worldly peace: it's spotty at best. It comes and goes. One day life can seem clear and simple, the next, complex and troubled. Some try to find peace by "getting away from it all." But whatever "it all" is catches up with us soon enough. Others try to bury their heads in the sand, but pretty soon, you have to come up for air, and there all the mess is waiting for you to deal with. The peace that Christ gives comes from God. It's the peace that lasts. It makes us strong on the inside, no matter what is happening on the outside. "The peace Christ gives is the confidence that God is God, and that neither our gains nor our losses has ultimate power." (8)

During the last two months of his life, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, wrote a book entitled *The Gift of Peace*. It had been a terrible time for Bernardin. In the prior three years he had been accused, falsely it turned out, of sexual misconduct. He had been diagnosed with cancer. He had had a lot to deal with, and now he had been told that that treatment for the cancer, which had returned, would not be useful to him. As he came to the end of his life, he wanted to share what was in his heart: that he was really at peace with God. He had made peace with the young man who had falsely accused him. He was at peace with the fact that his life was drawing to a close. Thirteen days before he died, he wrote these words, with which I close:

"It is the first day of November, and fall is giving away to winter. Soon the trees will lose the vibrant colors of their leaves. . . The earth will shut down, but we know that spring will soon come again with all its new life and wonder. It is quite clear that I will not be alive in the spring. But I will soon experience new life in a different way. I do not know what to expect in the afterlife, but I do know that just as God has called me to serve him to the best of my ability throughout my life on earth, he is now calling me home. . . What I would like to leave behind is a simple

prayer that you may find what I have found - God's special gift to us all: the gift of peace. When we are at peace, we find the freedom to be most fully who we are, even in the worst of times . . . We empty ourselves so that God may be fully at work within us. As I have said so often, let this be our prayer, 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.'" (9)

There is no greater prayer than that, and it's easy to pray, all day long. "Lord, made me an instrument of your peace." Amen.

(1) Jeff Elder, *The Charlotte Observer*.

(2) *The New York Times Magazine*, 4/26/09.

(3) Ibid.

(4) *Christian Century*, 8/11/09.

(5) *The Charlotte Observer*.

(6) Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life*, IVP Books, 2008, p.122.

(7) Ibid, p. 125.

(8) Fred B. Craddock, *John*, John Knox Press, 1982, p.111.

(9) Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace*, Loyola Press, 1997.