

Love's Call: Just Being Together

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The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost ~ July 21, 2013

Based on Luke 10:38-42

Too Fast

Did you ever have the experience of not being there for a friend because you were going too fast? They needed to talk with you or be with you but you could not slow down enough to return their phone call or have dinner with them.

It is like you are barreling down the inside lane of a packed four lane highway and then someone tells you to take the exit. You cannot get over fast enough to slow down and exit, so you don't do it, and then you say a shallow, "I hope you are well," when you know they are not.

Then later when you are with your friend, you feel awful. No matter what you were doing earlier—good, bad, or indifferent—you know you made the wrong choice.

Cat's in the Cradle

That is what happens in Harry Chapin's song *Cat's in the Cradle*. What a brutal song for a number one hit. The melody is sing-songy. It draws you in like it is going to be a folksy diddy and then it unfolds with this heart-breaking story that makes you feel queasy. It is not a bubblegum rock tragedy like "Leader of the Pack" with its vroom, vroom about the rich girl who falls in love with a biker who then dies in a crash. The 1964 #1 hit was obviously made to sell 45RPM disks on AM radio.

The hard part about *Cat's in the Cradle* is that, though the story is made up, it is real. It is a tragedy not because someone dies, but because the characters never really live.

It is about making the wrong choice. It is a story of just not being there for your loved one. In fact, it is the story of not being there, period.

Most of you know the plot line. It is simple. The son wants to be with the dad. The dad is too busy to be there with the son. Then later in life the son is too busy to be there for the dad. You remember the song. It begins:

*"My child arrived just the other day...
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away...
...when you comin' home, Dad
I don't know when, but we'll get together then,
son
You know we'll have a good time then."*

The son grows up:

*"My son turned ten just the other day
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play
Can you teach me to throw", I said "Not today
I got a lot to do", he said, "That's ok..."*

Then the kid goes to college and wants the car keys and he is gone. Later, the dad retires and wants to be with the son, but now his son has no time. The dad reaches out but the son says,

*"...I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time
You see my new job's a hassle and kids have
the flu
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad
It's been sure nice talking to you."*

In the end the son is just like the dad. The ending just drifts away, unresolved.

The dad chose the wrong thing. The busy business of life took over. The urgent crowded out the important. It all looked like the right choice at the time. What was lost? The most important thing...just being together.

Couples

This happens to some couples. Perhaps it has happened to you. If not, it has certainly happened to someone you know.

Couples often begin their relationship with the heat of great intimacy that comes with being together all the time. But then the demands of life set in, they are not together as much and then slowly but surely their relationship cools. When the truth is confronted, it is painful.

Perhaps their conversation sounds like a Harry Chapin song:

"When are you coming home?"

"I don't know when..."

"You are never around anymore."

"Work's crazy."

"You are not here and when you are I can't get your attention"

"I am working for you...there were planes to catch and bills to pay."

"I don't want your work, I want you, I want us..."

"I want that too, where did it go...?"

Just being together matters. When that goes away all sorts of things can fall apart. Love and intimacy cannot always stand the loss of just being together. The missed connection is brutal.

Martha and Mary Story

The Martha and Mary story is about being together or not being together. It is about connection and missed connection.

We often look at this story from the perspective of Martha and Mary, but what if we look at this story from the perspective of Jesus? Maybe Jesus just wants to be with Martha and Mary. After all, Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus are some of his best friends. Their home must be a haven of blessing and peace for Jesus, for a man who says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head." Perhaps Jesus wants to be with Martha and Mary now because he is on the way to Jerusalem. In the scriptural story that means he is on his way to death.

Sometimes we just need to be with someone: to talk, to share, to be together. This is why people have coffee together. Sometimes another person's presence is like a healing balm. It calms us down, centers us. The communion puts us together. It does not work if one of the parties is distracted. In other words, when you are there, but not really present. There is no connection. We experience this all the time with people on their individual smart phones.

In the story, Mary is there for Jesus, seated at his feet. Martha is not. She is there but not present. She is distracted by many things, no doubt all of them worthy. Jesus probably just dropped by with his friends without telling anyone they were coming.

When we read the newspapers, we think of the Middle East as a violent place. What we do not hear in the news is that hospitality in the Middle East is taken very seriously—in

Jesus' day as well as today. It is a cultural core value. Our friend The Reverend Bill Sachs, who spoke at the Abraham's Tent series, noted that he took a bus load of people to visit the house of a friend in Oman and the whole community cooked food so that they would be properly welcomed.

This is something of what it must have been like for Martha. Can't you hear Martha singing in Harry Chapin's voice, "There are meals to fix and a place to stay."?

The Martha and Mary story is not just about being and doing and contemplation and action. It is about love and the type of intimacy that comes from just being together. That is the better part that Mary chose...just being together.

Jesus Wants to Be with You

I am sure that Jesus wants to be with you. He just wants to be with you, so that the two of you can enjoy the type of communion that comes when close friends sit together, fully present to each other. Your friendship and

intimacy cannot happen unless you spend time together.

Did you ever think about how distracted you are? After all, there are planes to catch and bills to pay. There are TV's and cell phones and to-do lists and good and bad habits to be attended to. Are you going so fast that you are driving by Jesus?

Sometimes you just need to stop. St. Paul says, "For now we see in the mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face." (1 Cor.13:12) This is the Christian hope, that someday we will meet Jesus face to face. Can you imagine what that conversation might be like?

*"Peter, Peter or Sara, Sara or Mike, Mike"
[insert your name here]. "I just wanted to be with you, but I could not get your attention. You were distracted by many things. I did not need all that running around. I did not need your taking care of everybody else. It would have been better if you had stopped and just sat down with me."*

Amen.