



## PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY

## LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

**Sunday, September 9, 2012**

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**Lection – Luke 8:40-42** (New Revised Standard Version)

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying.

### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

As the church seeks to faithfully create a moment of pastoral celebration, it may do so with a sense of how demanding it is for one to serve as pastor-preacher in our contemporary world. Today's pastor-preacher faces many soulfully stressing and demanding questions, including:

- How can I trust that an Old Book will continue to make sense to a new world?
- How do I preach relevantly in a rapidly changing world?

- How do I pastor and preach meaningfully to heads and hearts that are under constant assault by marketing arsenals and media?
- How is it possible for preaching to spiritually really matter given the complexity of human hopes and pain in this age?

Paradoxically, the most important factor in a pastor/preacher's ability to say and be may be her ability *not* to say, and be still. The truly liberating word hinges on fearlessness before wordlessness, on trust in silence. Esteemed spiritual sage Abraham Heschel whispers, "The strength of faith is in silence, and in words that hibernate and wait. Uttered faith must come out as surplus of silence, as the fruit of lived faith, of enduring intimacy." The highly and widely revered retired long-time preacher/pastor Gardner Taylor, testifies, "I realized my work was not to be forever doing something...but trying to be something and wait on something." Therefore, the more important question is not "Can the preacher preach?" but, given our "crazy-busy" world, "Can the pastor-preacher stop preaching and pastoring long enough to truly hear the word that is silence before it is word?"

In this vain, the central purpose of this worship moment of celebration is to enable the pastor-preacher to give herself permission to resist being overwhelmed by all, and gently experience God's grace for who she is and not for all she does.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Luke 8:40-42**

The New Revised Standard Version of Luke's Gospel, Chapter 8, verses 40-42, offers the following passage:

*Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying.*

"They were all waiting for him." You bet they were. Jesus was heading back to his home region after a rather noteworthy evangelistic crusade. Along with preaching captivating sermon-stories, Jesus had allegedly, through the power of his spoken word, halted a storm and cured a man possessed by demons. Is it any wonder that Jesus would have trouble sneaking back into town unnoticed?

Chances are some in the crowd had needs of their own, none of which rivaled the great challenges that Jesus faced with the storm and the demons. Surely, Jesus would have a moment to hand out a few minor miracles. Maybe others in the welcoming party just came to watch, and perhaps shake his hand and say, "Way to go, Jesus!"

What we may note in the text is that though "all" waited for him for whatever reasons, Jesus responded to the request of just one, Jairus, whose daughter was deathly ill. Though confronted and surrounded with tens if not hundreds of legitimate concerns, demands, and expectations, Jesus paused, surveyed the matters before him, and gave himself permission to choose just one matter for the moment.

Single-mindedness is an endangered practice. Preachers are conditioned to do multiple things at a time. It has become our way of life, our oppressive obsession. We love multitasking. What a liberating blessing of grace and space to give ourselves permission to choose one over all, and detach our sense of being from our production.

### **Practices for Avoiding Trying to Do It All**

Own your incompletions. Often we set up ourselves for inevitable let-down by overbooking the day. Our planned schedule can stress us out before we undertake task number 1. We can better manage the front end of the day by scheduling less. An effective back end of the day strategy is learning to live with the undone. Allow yourself to be at peace with what you had planned to do but were not able to get to that day. Tell yourself that the matter will be handled sufficiently soon enough, and that the extra time to address it may even provide for a greater solution to the challenge. A great day is not one in which you've done everything. You have a great day by giving the day a great you.

Practice stopping. Busy-ness is the source of much modern discontent. It is not that we are so busy, but many of us are addicted to being so busy. Not being busy places us in a state of temporary discomfort. Such a state is necessary. Learning to stop and hold our energy is a crucial tool for cultivating contentment. Stopping is risky, because it suggests that who we are, where we are, and what we have in the moment is enough. And that is exactly the sentiment we convey to our souls and our souls convey to us when we dare to stop and relax in a moment of deep contentment.

Jesus was a “master-stopper.” Consider the following words found in the Gospels:

“Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea....” —Matthew 13:1

“Rising up early in the morning, he went out to a solitary place....” —Mark 1: 35

“He went up into a desert place....” —Luke 4:42

“Jesus being wearied, sat on a well....” —John 4:6

With so much on him, so much expected of him, so much at stake, and so little time, how was Jesus able to give himself permission to rest? How and why was Jesus able to rest so easily and frequently?

*What if Jesus believed that turning it off was as important as turning it on, that you couldn't really turn it on if you didn't really turn it off?*

*What if Jesus believed that there were dimensions of God, personhood, and life that could only be accessed through leisure and Sabbath?*

*What if Jesus believed that rest did not detract from his creative labor, but rather preserved, replenished, and ignited it?*

Avoid the curse of the competent. The curse of the competent is being good at many things, so good that many persons are constantly requesting your services. The ultimate bite of the curse is

constant consent: an inability to say “No” when one’s plate is already overloaded. Learn to excel without always expecting to be and trying to be all things to all people.

### **A Parable to Live By: Living *Always* Appreciated**

There is a story told of the musk deer of North India. In the springtime, the roe is haunted by the odor of musk. He runs wildly over hill and ravine with his nostrils dilating and his little body throbbing with desire, sure that around the next clump of trees or bush he will find musk, the object of his quest. Then at last he falls, exhausted, with his little head resting on his tiny hoofs, only to discover that the odor of musk is in his own hide.

So often, the musk deer’s fate is our own. We push and pull so hard and so often to be acknowledged, affirmed, and appreciated. This inner drive can get out of hand when the acceptance is not easily won, and we end up over-reaching for it in our relationships and on our jobs. Living with God’s appreciation is living with the firm belief that we are eternally embraced in the most exquisite love of all. Such glorious internal acceptance and appreciation is not based on all we do but on all we are in God’s eyes.

Divine appreciation allows preacher-pastors to lead light and easy lives in heavy and hard times. Teaching and facilitating sabbath (rest, relaxation, contentment) by one’s pastor is one of the greatest gifts that any church can give to a pastor on Pastor’s Anniversary Sunday.

### **Celebration**

We thank God for every pastor who was there when we needed them most. Their patience, their prayers, their kind acts, their preaching, and their teaching has blessed our lives in ways too numerous to name. We thank God for their time, talent, and spiritual guidance. How fortunate we are to have men and women who have taken up the charge in good times and bad times to stand as leaders, as pillars, as advocates, as spiritual agents and change agents. As a small token of our appreciation, we covet this day to be the type of Christians who lighten the load of pastors, who advocate for the health and rest of pastors, and who pray for the well-being of pastors.

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details conjured by this passage include but are not limited to:

**Sights:** The crowd waiting for Jesus; sick people waiting; people on cots waiting for healing; parents with sick children waiting; Jairus making his way through the crowd and falling at the feet of Jesus; Jesus ignoring the crowd and concentrating only on Jairus; a twelve-year-old girl who is dying;

**Sounds:** The chatter of the people as they waited on Jesus; the sound of Jairus begging Jesus to come to his house to heal his child; the comments made by those who did not receive the attention of Jesus; and

**Colors:** Jesus dressed in a beige garb; the colors of the clothing of the crowd; the royal colors worn by Jairus, who was a leader of the synagogue.

### III. Ways to Celebrate a Pastor's Anniversary

Here are just a few big and small ways a congregation can celebrate a Pastor's Anniversary. A link to a longer list is offered at the end of this section.

- **Give a Sabbatical as a Gift**—If your pastor has served faithfully for at least 5 years, present your Pastor with a paid sabbatical leave of at least 3 months. This should be in addition to the pastor's regular vacation for the year.
- **Gift from the Church**—Present your pastor with the funds to hire a staff person in an area that needs help and will greatly lighten the pastor's workload. Spend time discussing with the pastor the position that needs to be filled and ensure that funds are budgeted to allow the person to remain in the position a minimum of three years.
- **We Love Our Pastor Ad**—Take out a full-page ad in your local newspaper featuring a photo of your pastor with church members' signature around it. Include a declaration of your love.
- **Give a Spa Package**—Give your pastor a two-day spa packet at a resort. The resort can be in or out of town. The aim is to make sure that for at least two days EACH QUARTER of the year, the pastor knows that he or she will be just be pampered.
- **Give the Gift of Prayer**—Give your pastor the gift of prayer. Create a chart, and allow members to choose a specific time that they will commit to pray weekly for the pastor this next year. They do not need to come to a specific place—just pray on their way to work or pray each Tuesday at 2 PM. The project could be done by a deacons group, choir, study class, or the entire church. Present the prayer promise chart to the pastor as a gift. Then remember to pray!
- **Gift from Kids**—Wouldn't it be fun for every child at your church to create a signed bookmark for their pastor using cardstock paper and crayons or markers? Laminate the bookmarks, and then call all the children forward at the end of worship to put their bookmarks in a basket for the pastor.
- **Gift from Youth**—Create a video in which the youth (up to age 18) read spoken word selections, dance, do mimes, give testimonies, read poems, etc. to show their appreciation and love for the pastor. Let youth celebrate the pastor as only they will.

**For an additional list, see "PASTOR'S APPRECIATION DAY."** Online location: [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=6&ved=0CDsQFjAF&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ibs.org%2Fpastorappreciation%2Fpdf%2FPAMideas.pdf&ei=-IaETZitLoXsOaSD\\_eQM&usgAFQjCNHx1bJEUXOFMzdU67Be-kTOWT5\\_9Q&sig2=SWXV0uGUXDlqW7WmTjhmzQ](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=6&ved=0CDsQFjAF&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ibs.org%2Fpastorappreciation%2Fpdf%2FPAMideas.pdf&ei=-IaETZitLoXsOaSD_eQM&usgAFQjCNHx1bJEUXOFMzdU67Be-kTOWT5_9Q&sig2=SWXV0uGUXDlqW7WmTjhmzQ) (accessed 12 January 2011).