

Sacred Everyday  
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## **Introduction Welcome to the Journey**

Come on a journey. Come and find the eye of the storm. Dare to see life differently. Dare to imagine that a single day – every day – could be filled with possibility.

That is what we have done here. Join us for this journey as we explore the sacred in the everyday.

We live in a culture that is great at holidays! We know how to do the big days well.

Unfortunately, those holidays have been transformed in our consumer society to nothing more than another long weekend or an opportunity for a sale.

Many people can't tell you the difference between Memorial Day and Veterans Day. We don't know when MLK or Presidents Day is without an automated alert on our phone. We rush from one 3-day weekend to the next in order to find release from the everyday.

What you are about to read is an experiment in welcoming the sacred into the everyday – every day.

Earlier this year, our congregation engaged the book "Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life" by Tish Harrison Warren. We talked about the topic of each chapter in our Sunday gatherings. The entire congregation was invited to contribute blogs to keep the conversation going during the week. A group emerged that covered each generation from the mid-20's to the upper 60's.

I want to thank Dori, John, Katie, Charlie, Bryan, and Sara for sharing their life experiences and insights. They opened our eyes and helped us to see what had been hiding there all along: that the sacred is tucked into, and hidden within, every day.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this and that your every day will be made better by it. I have learned to love the everyday – every day.

- Bo Sanders (pastor)



## Introduction

Welcome to the Journey

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## Chapter 1 Waking Today Is Sacred

Today is sacred. Actually, every day is sacred.

We are in danger of forgetting that as a culture and society.

I don't know if it stems from setting aside certain days 'holy' (the origin of *holidays*) that turns the *every day* into 'normal' and mundane. I don't know if it the nature of our work life or if it is a consequence of moving away from agrarian life and depending on the seasons.

But something happened where the *every day* became a code word or a buzz word for monotonous and plodding. This is a great tragedy because **most** of our days are these 'average' days. No wonder we look forward to holidays and long weekends so much.

What a missed opportunity! Can you imagine what it would look like if believed that today was special in and of itself?

Not only would today, then, become sacred – but by extension, every day would become sacred.

You would **wake up** to the most magnificent implication of '*being an Easter people*': today really matters.

Today matters because it is the first day of the rest of your life. Today might be the only day you have. Today is full of possibilities. What you do today will set the tone for the rest of your days.

- You are loved today
- You were redeemed for today
- God wants to use you today
- Somebody needs what you have to offer today

This week we begin a journey as a church to find something special, something sacred, in the *every day*. I hope that you will get the book and follow along – maybe even join the conversation. Who knows ... maybe today will turn out to be something really special.

### When Does Your Morning Begin? (Bo)

"When does your morning begin?" was our opening question in this week's conversation.



Depending on work, kids, and age – that answer probably has an ‘AM’ behind it. For me, 5am seems early but 8am seems a luxury.

### **What if you were to adopt an ancient Jewish perspective that your day actually begins at sundown the evening before?**

This is my challenge this week!

Today is Monday and I asked myself on Sunday (yesterday) “What do I want my Monday to look like?” and then I prepared for it as the sun set last night.

I will do the same tonight. I have a long day Tuesday so instead of ‘vegging out’ and filling up this evening, I am going to get prepared. I will lay out my clothes (not my normal practice), turn off my electronics, watch what I eat and drink, and do something to calm myself (like stretching) so that I have the best chance of sleeping.

I would like to invite you to try this practice with me. Let’s see if it makes a difference in your week.

If you are not ready for that, I also found a cool morning practice. Keep a bowl of water by your bed, bathroom mirror, or beside your kitchen stove. (*You may to cover it with a cloth or pour a new one each morning*).

Then first thing in the morning – before anything else (or while the water is heating for coffee and tea) – place three fingers in the water (to symbolize the trinity) and touch it to your forehead. Remember your baptism.

It may also help to say part or all of the following confession:

I am born again today

I am born of water and spirit into my new life

Today is a new day

Today is a divine day

I am beloved (of my Father/Mother)

These two practices are invitations to see your *every* day as sacred and full of possibility. The goal



of today is not to survive. The goal of today is shine with the divine in the midst of the ordinary. You have a light within – nurture it and let it shine.

### **Baptism Around the Coffee Pot (Bryan Cooper)**

I have never had an epiphany in the truest sense of the word. My whole life I have been in a spiritual community surrounded by faithful people trying their best to live up to the Word. I'm envious of people who can tell their own 'Road to Emmaus' story. But my spiritual journey has been far more mundane. And this week's sermon of how there is divinity in the mundane, how there is spirituality in just waking up every day, how every day can begin with our own personal baptism — all of that got me thinking about my father.

We arrived at our little church most Sunday mornings in a bluster and hurry to get to Sunday School, or check in with friends. My brother and I would burst through the door and veer left to our classrooms, tennis shoes squeaking on the tiles. My mother, who served on innumerable committees, swerved left looking for our pastor to check in with her about Church Council activities or Finance matters or Building committee agendas. My Father turned right.

To the right was the coffee pot. Everyone counted on my father to make the coffee in the mornings so that when it came time to gather between the Sunday School lessons and the Sermons – the baptismal font was steaming hot and ready full of coffee.

My father did much for the little church we attended over the twenty years we were there, he served on Trustees, he cooked and delivered Mobile Meals every week, he led many Scout Troops, but probably the biggest spiritual impact he had was in that right turn he made every Sunday morning. In the most mundane way possible he made community possible. Standing there with mug in hand everyone could hear how Tom & Leigh were doing on their house hunt, how Jerri's doctoral thesis was coming along, what the oncologist had said about Bob and can we help. That silly coffee pot was the place that all the real communing started in my little church and my father always made sure the sacramental elements of the day were ready when Sunday School was over.

### **Waking Up To Easter (Bo)**

Easter is a waking up. How do you wake up an Easter people?

When I was a child, my father would sometimes wake us up with an Easter song. It is called 'Up From The Grave He Arose' and it still brings a smile to my face when I think about it.



This came to my mind as we were picking songs from Easter. We did not choose this song but it is always in the back of my mind.

It became even more relevant when I started reading 'Liturgy of the Ordinary' and the opening chapter was about 'waking up'. I started working on my sermon for 'waking up' before Easter and found it impossible to think about one without thinking about the other.

**Easter is a waking up.**

**It is waking up to new life, hope, second chances, and possibilities.**

**Every morning is invitation to an Easter people to 'be a different way in the world'.**

Here is a video about being woken up by Easter. *I hope you enjoy a little levity on a Wednesday afternoon.*

I also hope that in this series you hear the invitation to wake up to a different way of being in the world as Easter people.

[\[youtube id="fCZ9LTrh7R4?\]](#)

### **Wake & Rise (Katie North)**

I recently set a goal with one of my closest people to start waking up at 6AM every day. We're on our second week of this new practice, and it is *tough*. My alarm clock screams over the whispers of the gentle Oregon rain outside my window and dredges me up from beneath my layers and layers of sleep. Once my consciousness is finally on the surface again (and I'm past the steady stream of "Nope. Nope. Nope" as my first intelligible thoughts), I realize that it's happened: I am awake.

This passage from sleep to waking can be painful. It would be much easier to give in to the pressure behind my eyes and slip back into the comfort of sleep. It usually takes physically getting my whole body out of bed to truly come awake. But every act of rising can be seen as an echo of response to a call from God.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, after the pain of years of exile in Babylon, God calls Jerusalem with this fresh new word of hope in Isaiah 60:1:

"Arise, shine; for your light has come,

And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."



Malachi 4:2 records a prophecy of restoration for God's family, saying that "For you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing on its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."

Jesus heals a 12-year-old girl in Mark 5 who had been pronounced dead from a ravaging sickness, shocking the mourners by saying that she was not, in fact, dead, but only sleeping. He takes her by the hand and uses the gentle words, "Talitha kum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" At his beckoning she animates and rises.

Ephesians 5:14 records this thunderous call:

"Awake, O Sleeper!

Rise from the dead,

And Christ will shine on you."

Every day is an opportunity to use our bodies to respond to each of these scriptures. Each of them acknowledges that to be un-awake is an easier choice. Leaving the non-obligation of sleep makes the lurch into consciousness feel like coming from death to life. But with waking up, we see the sunrises of healing, restoration, and hope. We rise with our bodies into a new day, meaning we are not dead, but alive.

I'm hoping my 6AM wakeup calls get easier as I practice them. But even in the pain of first waking, I am reminded of this baptism back into life. As the rain still whispers its baptism on the earth outside my window, I will keep rising to live awake in this gift of a life.

Will you join me?

### **Sundown (Dori Killion)**

It is a very interesting perspective, from the ancient Jewish tradition, of treating Sundown as a pause to the beginning of a new day.

Sundown is a beautiful time to stop. Stop work, unplug, sit with God and ask "How shall we spend the next 24 hours?" One sure way to restful sleep is knowing that in the morning I can hit the ground running.

Sundown is a time of discernment, when I ponder consequences and shift my priorities. It's making plans while remaining open to how God might use me. It's every good intention from the

bottom of my heart.

Sundown is check-in time: How am I doing God? I know I can do better.

Sundown is that painful honesty that exposes my inaction and knowing God loves me still.

Sundown is a beautiful time to stop...and start again.

### **This is the day that the Lord has made? (Charlie Jesch)**

Do I believe this? Did the community of Creation, the Trinity, God, make this day? What does it mean that this day, this very day, was made by the God? How am I to respond to this?

When I awake, I rarely am thinking that the Lord made this day. Throughout my day, it is not a thought that comes into my mind. So do I believe it?

To be honest, I don't know. I look around and see pain. I live in pain, despair...hopelessness. Life at times feels as if it a mill stone, slowly grinding away the hope and joy I wish I had. Cognitively, I can accept the claim that God made today, but this is not realized in my life. Often I'm not even sure what to make of it. What I see and feel is that all there is, is pain and sorrow. Is that really what today was made for? I honestly don't think so, but so often it feels as if that is all that a new day brings.

The rest of Ps. 118:24 reads, "We will rejoice and be glad in it." When I read this, I balk. Why should we rejoice when there is so much pain. Is it because God is good? That doesn't lead me to rejoice and be glad. It is too abstract for me to grasp.

I have to remember how I know that God is good. I have experienced the goodness of the Trinity. It has changed me ontologically. I experience the goodness of God in the warmth of my friendships, in the eyes of strangers, the tears that stream down my face when life seems to much and there is so much in me that I don't know how to express. The goodness of God meets me in each of these, reminding me that there is hope for something better than the pain.

As the pain of life comes crashing down, I have to remember the Kin-dom of God, the reality that Christ ushered into the world. This new reality is a banquet. This new creation, represented and embodied Christ's resurrection, is the first fruits of The Kin-dom. It is an abundant life. A life that



the scripture tells us it will be even greater than that which we suffer and lose. It is a life where we find an abundance made manifest in the loving community that comes to the table of God to feast. The table has been set and it is ready for the family to come together. This is a reason to rejoice and be glad.

As I awake, my prayer is to remember this: though there is much pain, suffering and remorse, there is a new creation, a community that welcomes me, that heals me, that restores my soul. This community is the Kin-dom that waits for the fullness of time to come, when all of creation is restored.

### **Holy, holy, holy! (John Espy)**

I've been retired just over 18 months. For a couple of years before I retired I started thinking and planning how I would spend my days in retirement. Rather than an end of my career I viewed it as the beginning of a new career, of what I was intended to do in this life, of finally fulfilling my purpose in life. My plans included starting every day with celebration of a new day; daily exercise, meditation, reading more than I had time for when I was working. I was going to spend more time intentionally connecting with God — exploring new spiritual practices, writing about encounters with Spirit, teaching and healing. I was going to get up every day, excited about what I was going to do that day to fulfill my destiny.

Alas, best laid plans.... Life often does not turn out as we had expected. It becomes just one ordinary day after another.

It's not that I have not been productive. My days have just been more mundane than I anticipated. Thanks in part to Pastor Bo I have jumped into the church with both feet, a little blood, lots of sweat and at least a couple of tears. But when I wake up in the morning, I have to admit that the Divine blessing of another day that the Lord has made has not been foremost in my mind. Coffee is first on the agenda; breakfast a close second. I check my calendar to see if I have to do anything that day at the church, but not with the mindset of doing God's work. Don't get me wrong, it's not that I don't enjoy the work — I do. I just don't think of God's immanence in the process.

However, this spring has introduced a renewed clarion call as I wake up in the morning. I sleep with the window open. Shortly before sunrise I start to awaken as lone robin raises her voice, heralding the coming of a new day. Soon, other voices join in — wrens, chickadees, finches. Even the raucous voices of crows add to the beautiful harmonious orchestration, welcoming entry of the life-giving and life-sustaining sun god into the great throne room in the temple of the heavens. It brings to mind Isaiah 6:1-3:

*In the year that King Ussiah died, I saw the Lord, He was seated on his throne. His long robe filled*



*the temple. He was highly honored.*

*Above him were seraphs. Each of them had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces. With two wings they covered their feet. And with two wings they were flying,*

*They were calling out to one another. They were saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord who rules over all. The whole earth is full of His glory."*

"Holy. holy, holy." indeed. That early morning serenade of birdsong-praise inspires my day with an infusion of the Divine as I come awake, calling me into new day where the mundane is not so mundane. It is in fact sacred.

Isaiah 6:8:

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord. He said, "Who will I send? Who will go for us?"*

*I said, "Here I am Lord, Send me!"*

### **Such a Day as This (Sara Ross)**

There's a sticker on the console of my car; it reads, *Perhaps you were born for such a day as this.* Pulled, a bit clumsily, from the Old Testament book of Esther – with the sticker-writer's reinterpretation of inspirational soundbite meaning – this one-liner is supposed to make me think that this day might be something especially good.

Most mornings, as I climb into my car, jostling to get my lunch bag and purse and coffee and smoothie settled in their usual spots, I glance at the sticker and think something like, *Hmmm... really? Today?* And then I start my drive, at least momentarily imagining the possibility that today, out of all the days, might be *important*. Maybe I'll engage with a stranger who desperately needs a simple moment of eye contact, or someone will ask for help I can give. Maybe my own path will meet a life-changing crossroads. I can get pretty grand and misty-eyed about it.

Or not. Sometimes I just drink my coffee and drive.

What I imagine Tish might say (I'm only one chapter in, but yes, the author and I are on a first-name basis), is that grand and misty-eyed or nonchalant, neither feeling is really the point. She'd say that *every day* we are born for such a day as this, not because of what we do or don't do, but because, before we even climb up from that cloudy land between asleep and awake, "we begin beloved" (20).



Wait, just think about that because it's a pretty life-altering thing to grasp. "We begin beloved."

There is nothing *wrong* about my grand and misty-eyed maybes; making eye contact with that struggling person or listening for guidance on my path certainly do matter. But what Tish is trying to point out is that regardless of what we do or don't do, want or don't want, we wake up each day already living inside the heart of grace. Every single ordinary, monotonous day.

I think I've got a new perspective on that sticker now. And, yes, we were born for such a day as this, for such a day as every single one we get.



## Chapter 2 Making the Bed Power of Practice (Sermon Notes)

Your body is not just a suitcase that carries your soul around.

Your body is not an automated shell that your brain tells what to do like a computer inside a robot.

**Your body informs your experience and shapes your behavior.**

Much of what you think, or even believe, about the world is because of the interactions of your body.

**Here is the audio podcast of this sermon: (13 min)**

<http://vermonthillsumc.org/podcast/power-of-practice-sermon/>

This is why what you do with your body matters. Your behaviors and routines inform and form you. They give shape to your day and thus your week and ultimately your life.

Annie Dillard has said it this way,

“How we spend our days, is of course, how we spend our lives.”

To the outside world, I appear spontaneous and even impulsive. But that internal permission is rooted in long hours of discipline and practice that frees my up to be spontaneous in the moment. The behind the scenes preparation is rooted in a deep commitment to values and practices. I move the chairs in the sanctuary every week – because I have been thinking for months about what that gathering should look like!

Your daily routine functions in a similar way. Your weekly patterns both form and inform you as people of faith.

The life of faith is comprised (made from) your participation in a community of faith.

**This is the liturgy of life.**

One of my favorite old-words is “phronesis”. I have talked about it before – it means embodied wisdom or enacted knowledge. It is a wisdom that you have down inside of you, embedded in the cells and muscles of your body.



If you do an activity, even if you have not done it in a while – like riding a bike again – there is set of “know-how” that has been formed through practice.

This is the case with playing a musical instrument, or caring for a child, or playing a sport, or doing a hobby.

My favorite example is teaching a teenager how to drive. Now you, if you have been driving a while, can day dream, change the channel (and all sort of other things) and still end up at your destination ... sometimes not even thinking about it on the primary register of your brain. That is *phronesis* – the way home is embedded in your muscle memory.

Teenagers do not have *phronesis*. Everything is happening on that primary register at the front of your mind! Hands at 10 & 2, turn on the lights, shoulder check, shift into reverse, etc.

This is the power of practice. You are moving an activity, an expertise, a knowledge down from the front of your mind into your body. Routine and practice go hand in hand.

The liturgies of our lives shape who we are and both form and inform our view of the world.

The book that we are reading “Liturgy of the Ordinary” encourages us to be intentional about our mornings. Instead of slogging through and mindlessly stumbling our way to the kitchen or the shower – to add a moment of intentional pause and prepare for the day.

I want to encourage you try it. To change up the routine this week. Whether that is her suggestion to make the bed and take a moment of silence (prayer) first thing in the morning, or to read something nourishing in the morning before you check your phone or turn on cable news ...

Like I said at the beginning: Your body is not just a suitcase that carries your soul around.

Your body is not an automated shell that your brain tells what to do like a computer inside a robot.

### **Your body informs your experience and shapes your behavior.**

Much of what you think, or even believe, about the world is because of the interactions of your body.

This is why what you do with your body matters. Your behaviors and routines inform and form you. They give shape to your day and thus your week and ultimately your life ... especially your life of faith.



[\[youtube id="NPKnTpSi\\_Lc"\]](#)

## **The Disorientation of a Summer Morning (Bryan)**

As a child, we didn't have air conditioning. In Oregon that elicits a shrug, but in the Midwest, summers were brutal. My parents' solution was to move my brother and I into the den where a lone window unit would struggle against the Oklahoma heat. Waking in summer for me would be disorienting and disjointed. My brother would be on the floor next to me, rather than an arm dangling from the top bunk. No superhero posters on the wall. The light would stream in from the doorway – not the windows. The ceiling was the wrong color. Everything was out of place and confusing. I spent every day of the summer trying to find my footing like a cat on a rolling ship's deck because my mornings always started in the wrong place.

These days, I value regimen and order. I wake up every morning facing East, get up at the same time, check that nothing has broken at the office overnight, shower, shave, dress and drive into work. No difference, no delta. I spend all day keeping everything on an even keel. No disruption.

But I don't think that is our calling. Jesus is nothing if not disruption. Living as a Christian should not be comfort and regimen. I think Jesus would want me to wake up every day feeling like nothing is set and every possibility is on the table.

I wonder how stunted my spiritual life is because I keep everything in its place and a place for everything to go. Am I not open to the possibilities that the Good News has for me because it's Tuesday and on Tuesdays I wear the grey slacks. How much of that order and safety makes me a mediocre disciple?

Tonight, maybe I should sleep in the den and just see what happens.

## **We Are What We Love (Katie)**

This week's chapter from *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Warren has a title I was excited to write about: "Making the Bed." Before I read it, I thought I could use this space to talk about how I got a set of new bedding that makes me feel like a grown up, and how the habit of making my bed does help me feel more organized and confident as I go about my day.

Then I read the chapter. My hopeful (and a little self-righteous) expectations for checking the box of bed-making were thwarted as she wrote about the deeper, more urgent impacts of our habits. How we spend our time is how we spend our lives, and what we dedicate time to is a reflection of what



we love and worship. James K. A. Smith writes, “We are what we love.”

Warren named the one habit I am desperate and terrified to break: using my phone. All the time. I am a true millennial in that I am never without it. It has been a conviction of mine to stop using social media so often, but the fleeting thought that “I shouldn’t do this as much” doesn’t win out against the flood of endorphins my brain gets with every new notification. It’s an addiction, and countless members of my generation are trapped in it.

We are what we do and what we love. I want to love God and my neighbor and the world, not screens. So, I am taking this week to examine my own habits. I’ve decided I am going to go buy a real alarm clock(!!!!) and get my phone out of my bedroom. That will be a start—spending my first few moments in silence, making my wonderful, grown-up bed and honoring the living, loving God with my groggy attention instead of a glowing screen.

Examine your own habits this week. What do you love? Who are you? Who does God call us to be? With the graces of God, my community, good bedding, and an alarm clock, I want to have my answers to those questions line up a little better. Amen—let it be so.

## **IKEA (Dori)**

My bed is a low profile twin from Ikea that I bought when I gladly downsized to make room for my Aunt who was my housemate and companion for the last five years of her life. Every morning when I get out of bed I think about how, after two years, it is high time I return to my real bedroom and set up my real bed where I can stretch out fully without hitting up against a wall. I will retrieve the down quilt from storage and go back to having fun making the bed. Just give that quilt a hard shake and you are good to go.

My feet hit the floor. They haven’t far to go. I need a new floor. Already I have unintentionally imprinted the day by reminding myself of my inaction. I struggle putting one foot in front of the other and chastise myself for not exercising. I turn on Morning Joe to see what blew up during my absence.

I’ve lost sight of the fact that I have just regained control of my body after 8 hours of surrender. If I don’t see the resurrection in that, where will I see it? Every morning is new life and deserves a nod of reverence straight away to the One who gave it.

So I will begin the morning with something new. As I solemnly knock on God’s door I will focus my attention on my body with a few precious, quiet moments of reaching, bending, stretching, balancing. Life surely deserves this much from me: that I approach it with a sense of urgency, intensity and intentionality. Maybe in this morning silence I will find it anew.

## I Do Not Make My Bed (Charlie)

I do not make my bed. Most mornings I'm out of bed at 5am and getting ready for work. This is a full hour or more before my wife needs to wake for her work. It would make very little sense for me to attempt to make the bed with her still dead asleep in it. But making the bed is not Tish Warren's point in chapter two of *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. Rather she puts forward a challenge, one that I have been growing more and more familiar with over the past few years. If what I do with my time shapes who I am, then why do I do the things that I do? I don't mean this in the sense of "why do I do bad (can I say sinful here) things," but rather, why do I fill my day up with so much that doesn't build on this sense, so many of us wrote about in last week's blog, that I am beloved by God?

To be a person who knows that they are beloved by God, means to live in a new way, a new life. But it is not a new life where one lives in rebellion, or opposition, from the world. That isn't compelling. It doesn't make sense. A new life requires a new way of living. This is the gospel. Jesus came to show us the way to salvation, to healing and restoration. I'm convinced that Jesus did not come to create a group of people whose very existence is demarcated by being antagonistic toward the world.

Yes, Jesus was antagonistic to "the world," (By world, I mean the Pharisees, Sadducees, the priest and scribes, and Rome) at times, but to say that that attitude is the foundation of the gospel would be missing the point of the gospel. Mark has Jesus say that he "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." John has Jesus pray that we would be one with each other and with God, as He is one with God. Being known by God, and knowing God, as Jesus did and does, was Christ's hope for those who followed him. I believe that this is Christ's hope and pray for us today.

We should live differently then. We shouldn't live simply "better" lives. Nor should we live "holy" lives. As if living a life that is set apart from the world does anything for gospel in and of itself. I see Christ calling us into the world, not out of it. We are called to bring peace and reconciliation to all. To co-create with God, this renewed life that goes so far beyond ourselves, but incorporates all life, all of creation.

But I don't know how to do this. Ironically enough, I identified the most with the study that showed that people would rather be electrocuted than to sit alone for fifteen minutes. I don't know how to. I go into a panic. But my hope, my prayer, is to learn how to live this new life, this life of someone that is beloved by God. All I can do is to try and make small changes in my life. For Tish Warren, it began with making a bed and sitting in silence for a few minutes every day. I don't know yet what it will be for me, but I am thankful that I can still come to the table that God has prepared for all of creation to enjoy. I am thankful for the community that I am surrounded by here in Portland and at VHUMC. Each day brings something new, a new beginning.



## Repentance is So Hard! (John)

A couple of weeks ago I misplaced my Fitbit. I was in a bit of a panic — how would I know how many steps I'd taken? How would I know the quality of my sleep? How would I monitor my heart rate? It took me a couple of days to recall that I'd taken it off in a pub after Wednesday Bible Study(!). With a sigh of relief, I got it back.

Last week Pastor Bo challenged us to not use any electronics for an hour or two after we get up in the morning. (Is the coffee grinder *electronic* or simply *electric*?) It was disorienting. Can't check my Fitbit? Can't check my email? Can't turn on the morning news? I found myself standing in the kitchen, coffee in hand, wondering what to do now.

Years ago I heard James Hillman say that, "People without conscious ritual are prone to addiction". [recovery.org](http://recovery.org) says that, "Using substances is often closely associated with deeply ingrained rituals...In most cases, ritualized behaviors are unconscious."

As a society, we are addicted to our electronics. Developers of electronic technology have mastered the art of hijacking and holding our attention. They steer us in the building of unconscious rituals. I had been rather smug in thinking I had escaped this trap by turning off all the notifications on my phone, unsubscribing to all the political emails, avoiding facebook (with only temporary relapses), only to realize that I was still hooked. The worst part was that the minor rewards I got from my Fitbit, iPhone, TV, etc. left me (at best) feeling empty, hungry for more or (at worst) angry and discouraged.

Technology is not all bad if we use it mindfully. My Fitbit just prompted me that I had not walked 250 steps in the last hour so I got up and walked around the yard, soaking in the newly arrived sunshine, breathing in the fresh air, feeling my heartbeat, noting the hostas sprouting and tulips blooming, listening to the singing birds, sensing God's presence in the springtime burst of renewed life.

It is hard work to turn around, to change direction, to "repent". It is hard work to recognize and turn away from our unconscious rituals. The constant "noise" of technology is a poor substitute for quiet awareness of our own bodies, of the natural world of air and trees and flowers and birdsong. Unconscious rituals are poor substitutes for the Divine. It is hard work, but when I am able to break free of my addictions and open myself to God's quiet presence I feel fulfilled and at peace, not empty and angry.

I know that the path to recovery is the building of intentional habits with regular spiritual practices — conscious rituals — of prayer and meditation, of making the bed and doing dishes, of spending time in nature and in building deep relationships with people. But it is hard work.



Psalm 18:32 (New English Translation):

*The one true God gives me strength;*

*he removes the obstacles in my way.*

## A New Day (Sara)

“Isn’t it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?” – *Anne of Green Gables*, Lucy Maude Montgomery

In chapter two of *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, Tish Harrison Warren writes, “The crucible of our formation is the monotony of our daily routines.” In chapter one, she quotes Annie Dillard: “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

Does the truth of these ideas make anyone else quake? Seriously, it feels like so much pressure!

Some of my fellow Sacred Everyday bloggers have posted this week about changes they’ve made or want to make in response to the ideas Tish puts forth in chapter 2. (Yes, Tish and I are still on a first-name basis.) Like Katie, I bought a regular old-fashioned alarm clock this week; goodbye to my iPhone sharing my pillow! Like John, I am listening differently when my fitness-tracker beeps. Engaging with the convictions we feel from this conversation is awesome. We’re only on week two I’m already thinking in new ways.

But something is weighing on me.

I once took a class that introduced, among many other things that I no longer remember, the concept of existential guilt, an idea that resonated so deeply in my person I can clearly remember the *Ping!* of yes-ness as I came to understand the meaning. That is, as a feeling of guilt – in me, breathlessness, anxiety, sorrow – that stems from a deep fear of not living up to one’s full potential. For those of us working to throw off the heavy mantle of perfectionism, facing up to the truth that what we choose to do *forms* us is akin to coming eye-to-eye with a charging bull.

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Ok, phew. (Takes a deep, calming breath. Closes eyes. Centers.) But, there is that lesson from last week to add to the equation. That is: grace.

Thank God for grace. I mean, really. *Thank you, God.*



Into this mix of the importance of *doing* what I want to be – trying to live into my desire to, every day, take a long walk and pray and write and be present with the people I love – of creating liturgies of daily life that reflect the woman I want to be, I have to remind myself to allow plenty of room for grace to step on in.

Routine is important. It does matter. I want to be mindful of mine. I am making changes.

I also aim to go slow. To be kind. To remind myself that my God is a God of forgiveness and space. Tish says, “Our hearts and loves are shaped by what we do again and again and again.” There is a softness to this change; it doesn’t happen over night. It’s not easy or fast; it’s not created by harsh rules. It involves forgiveness and acceptance. “The work of repentance and faith,” Tish writes, “is daily and repetitive. Again and again, we repent and believe.”

So, here I am reminding myself that attention, not perfection, is the goal. I’m not in this for ideal symmetry and zero mistakes. The long haul is about trying and failing, forgiveness and grace. I’ll do my best today and start over tomorrow, fresh and focused and maybe even a little bit hopeful.



## Chapter 3 Brushing Teeth Body Talk (Sermon Notes)

Many of us have been sold a bad brand of Christianity. It has something faulty at its core and produces something very harmful in the end.

The core problem is that your 'spirit' is the really important thing. Your mind is the next most important thing. In distant third is your body. At best, it is inconsequential to your spiritual journey. At worst, your body is harmful or dangerous and must be guarded against.

So much of modern Christianity is nearly dis-embodied. It is about what you believe in your heart (*wherever that is*) and what you understand with your mind. *This is bizarre for a religion whose primary story is incarnation.*

**The reality is that your body is central to your spiritual journey.** It is a vessel for the journey. It is the ship in which you sail. Not irrelevant at all. Your body has so much to do with your journey.

So that is the core problem ... but then it bears some devastating consequences.

Yesterday was Earth Day so it is notable that we view earth in much the same way that view our body. I am surprised that the brand of Christianity I run into the most thinks that the future of the earth is only destruction, devastation, and Armageddon. That is a harmful brand of Christianity.

Many believers are surprised to learn two things about the Christian story.

1. It begins in a garden but it also ends in a garden. *The poetry and symbolism are profound.*
2. The future of our earthy body is not devastation, decay, and destruction – but New Creation.

**The future of our planet is New Creation.** The Bible ends with a new heaven and new earth.

The bad brand of Christianity that is dis-embodied also sees the Earth as a cardboard box –a temporary container- to be discarded and burned when we are done with it.

This is a profound misreading that affects the Body of Christ (God's children around the world) and the Earth which is a gift from God that we are supposed to care for and cultivate.

On Easter I talked about Christ's glorified body. It was neither a ghost nor a zombie ... but a glorified body that was not limited by walls, still had the marks of the spear, and could make breakfast on the shore for the disciples. It was both like and unlike Jesus' crucified body because God had glorified it.



This is a foretaste of New Creation. Easter is a prolepsis (a *coming attractions* if you will) – not just for each of us but for all of creation! New Creation is the future of the planet.

In this light, your body is central to your religious faith and your spiritual journey. Likewise, the Earth is central to the experience of the Body of Christ.

Today would be a good day to consider one thing we might begin doing and one thing that we might stop doing if the brand of Christianity we were sold is faulty.

### **Did John the Baptist Brush His Teeth? (Bryan)**

In this week's chapter of the **Liturgy of the Ordinary**, Tish Warren talks about the quotidian tasks that make up our every day. When we fight back against our daily decline — be it vanity, or health, or just habit, much of our daily life is spent just attempting to reverse the entropy of existence. She starts with the act of brushing teeth. How that simple task is so menial and far removed from the call of the spirit.

So, as a thought exercise I tried to think of the most 'consumed by the spirit' character I could envision from the scriptures. It has to be John the Baptist, right? I mean that is the one guy you look at who spent every ounce of energy finding his calling. No wasted motion on picking out the right shirt for the day. Not going to blow precious minutes cooking up any lamb. If it doesn't have the economy of getting right down to the river for the day, then I can't envision John the Baptist suffering any distractions from his mission. No — I doubt he brushed his teeth.

But, as Tish Warren says, that isn't the model we are given. The model we are given is a fully unbounded divinity that is fully bounded by the flesh, and the dandruff, and the stubble, and the earwax, and last night's stew stuck between the molars. I know that I will never have the passion of John the Baptist just as I know that I will always brush my teeth in the morning. Maybe that is okay — maybe I don't have to try to be something other than a regular person living inside an increasingly failing body who is just trying to do the best with what I have. To live as I have been asked to live inside this unique vessel. To go on trying to do the right thing as long as I recognize and acknowledge that gift of this fleshy blessing — even when I am doing something as mundane as brushing my teeth.

### **Every Movement We Make (Katie)**

I have a small tattoo on the inside of my left wrist. It is a word, inked in white letters written by the hand of a friend, that reads, "worship." I chose that word because of a poem crafted by a brilliant



artist named Anis Mojgani. The line from the poem says,

*Walk through this with me,*

*into this house of bone and blood.*

*It is a church,*

*and every movement we make is worship.*

I have had a tough time living into the sentiment of that poem over the years—I have not been kind to my body, though it has forgiven me generously. I have struggled through an eating disorder as well as episodes of self-harm. I believed the lies that my body was too-much-not-enough, and I suffered for it. I resented my body and abused it as an avenue to unhealthily express my emotional pain, to the point where I wanted to get rid of my body and mind altogether. But after several difficult, amazing years in counseling (and a working antidepressant), I have finally rehabilitated my relationship with my body, and with life itself. I have learned to see myself with new eyes—to see this house of bone and blood in which I will live for all of my days as a gift. As a church. As holy ground.

I have gone from hating my body to actually, really, truly loving it. I love it because I get to pet dogs with my hands. I get to smell coffee in the morning. I get to play my private game when I go shopping at the mall where I challenge myself to find the softest item in the store (I always win). I get to sing and dance at live concerts. I get to use my legs to hike around the PNW. I get to look into the eyes of my loved ones. I get to kiss and laugh and nap and sprint and clap and sing and weep and listen and breathe. Inhabiting my body means I am *alive*. And giving my life as a gift to the living God is what I want to do always.

So, the little letters carved in white ink into my skin remind me that I am alive, and that is my favorite thing to be. It is my life-prayer, my reminder, my intention that every movement I make can be worship of the God who grounds and names me as beloved in every breath. Amen.



### **Caring for the Stranger (John)**

This thing keeps following me around. Everywhere I go, there it is. Every time I look in a mirror I am startled to see it, right there, this stranger looking back at me.

This stranger is, of course, my body. I've been estranged from my body for most of my life. I didn't do many sports as a kid. My mother eventually gave up on piano lessons for me. When I tried joining a drumming circle in the 90's it was readily apparent that I had absolutely no rhythm.

I did the minimalist tasks to care for my body, brushing its teeth, bathing it, dentist visits and doctor appointments. But it was a mundane drudgery, performed only out of a sense of necessity. I hated exercising. I treated my body like a petulant child by indulging it when it wanted a beer or seconds (or thirds) at dinner, giving in to its demands for attention so that I could go on ignoring it.

I was blessed with a reasonably durable body, capable of enduring a significant degree of neglect and abuse. However, it really started interfering with my life when I ruptured a disk a decade ago. Tasks I had taken for granted, like walking and going down stairs, were difficult if not impossible. As I recovered from surgery I started taking care of my body a bit more seriously. But just a bit.

About a year before I retired I really started thinking about my future with this vessel on which I was so dependent. I started walking at lunch. Before long I realized that I was enjoying getting out in the fresh air and actually moving my body. Since retirement I've continued walking (and enjoying it) almost daily.



Tish's book has reminded me that my body is more than a vessel, a container for my mind and soul. It is not some machine that I need to tweak and tune. It is the means by which I exist in the world.

Life is a miracle. Jesus may have walked on water, but life itself is by far the greater miracle. We start out as an infinitesimal speck of DNA from each of our parents, then God builds us out of the dust of the earth, then breaths life and soul into us. Our body, our mind and our soul are one, a trinity.

Our body is a gift beyond measure! It is the means by which we live and love; by which we seek and find and worship God. If God considered life in a human body so precious that God incarnated Herself into one in the form of Jesus, then how can I not be greatly honored, drawn to care for this gift? How can I love and care for my wife, my children, my friends and strangers if I don't have a body with which to do so? The better I care for this body the more opportunity to meet, love and care for friends and strangers.

The stranger I most need to meet and love and care for is my own body.

Genesis 2:7 (The Message)

God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive — a living soul!

### **Standing Before the Grand Canyon Covering My Eyes (Sara)**

*"Last week, I met Shawnessey for a tour of the [Botanical Garden](#). When I arrived, she was sitting out front with a wheelchair for me. Since I hadn't seen the garden before, she wanted me to experience the whole of it without getting too tired to enjoy it. The wheelchair was a blessing because, honestly, just getting myself ready and to the garden that day had worn me out. I willingly submitted to riding and was quiet for the first little while as Shawnessey pushed me down paths and I got used to this moment in my life. The moment when, after being alone and mostly quiet inside my apartment for days, I came out and took a seat and here was all of this wonder. Something about me being in a wheelchair and that day feeling so... unabashedly, adolescently fresh brought tears to my eyes. This was a moment so beautiful, it hurt to look at it. I fell in love with the garden, but maybe also with an imagination of going back someday when things are in bloom, and I can feel the muscles in my legs as I walk and walk and walk."*

I wrote that paragraph on October 29, 2014, three weeks after my last chemotherapy infusion. Having submitted to life-altering surgery and six months of chemo for ovarian cancer, at 38-years-old, my body was ravaged.



Talking about embodiment is complicated.

Honestly, to make it through that time, there was some necessary separation between *what my body is* and *who I am*. Now, 3+ years post-treatment, I am trying to make sense of it, to glue some of those broken bits back together again.

We who get to grow older will all eventually face some aspect of the frailty I felt that afternoon in a wheelchair in the garden. The knowledge of what that future holds makes me shy away from embracing the connection that inherently exists between the “disembodied spirits-floating-on-clouds spirituality” (38) that Tish warns against and this real-world fallible imperfect humanness that I inhabit.

Then there is Jesus. Incarnation. Sweat “like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Or, as Tish writes, “He slept. He ate. He groomed. He took naps, got his feet dirty...” (39). “The Word made flesh” (John 1:14).

God, in a body, getting it. Now, there is something to think about...

Several weeks ago, when Bo first preached something about our bodies as sites of worship, I went to him in wonder, told him that this idea was so resonant for me. Little did I know that this series, this book study, this particular chapter was coming.

Do you ever get the sense that you’re in the right place at the right time? Not because it feels good and safe and perfect, but because there are voices around you saying what you know a place deep inside you needs to hear?

I have been, for the last few years, trying to take my life back from cancer. I have felt the muscles in my legs walk and walk and walk. I have taken time to smell flowers, to cup them in my hands. I have stopped to stare up at the way sunshine comes through the leaves above me. I have put my arms around trees and felt the moss against my cheek. I can feel God in nature, in the very physicality of the world, but still, part of this *idea* of my spirit has remained safely tucked away from my physical embodiment because... I know how precarious that embodiment is.

Maybe it’s time to come back to a middle place. Maybe this is another step in that direction: writing this down, exploring in community the idea that my “skin and muscles and feet and hands are more sacred than any communion chalice or baptismal font,” that my body is “a worship space more wondrous than the most glorious ancient cathedral,” that I am “standing before the Grand Canyon or the Sistine Chapel” and covering my eyes (45).

Tish continues: “So, I will fight against my body’s fallenness. I will care for it as best I can, knowing that my body is sacred and that caring for it (and the other bodies around me) is a holy act.”



This is not an easy conversation – I don't think examining the way we treat our bodies ever is – and I honestly can't quite make sense of how any of us put our broken Humpty-Dumpty selves back together again, but we can embrace the truth that, by the grace of our persistent, present, life-giving Creator, someday, over time, God will.



## Chapter 4 Losing Keys Exposed by Change (sermon notes)

I don't like losing my keys. Not because of the inconvenience, or being late, or turning over every leaf and cushion to find them.

I don't like losing my keys because of what it exposes in me.

Normally I am a fairly competent, thoughtful, productive, spiritual, kind, and generally easy-going person.

When I lose my keys, those attributes are in a danger of being exposed as a façade.

I am afraid that all of those good things about me are just a thin veneer that I am able to uphold when everything goes my way and is predicable.

You might think that I am overreacting but here is what you don't know – I lose my keys if even one thing changes in my routine. It can be anything and it only needs to be one thing.

- Unexpectedly getting up early.
- A house guests.
- A change in plans.
- A change in weather.
- Moving furniture.

To an outsider, I might not appear to be highly structured. I am a very spontaneous person. It is the structure (thinking of a floating dock), however, that allows me to jump off into the waters of spontaneity. When I am out of sorts, I go to push off the platform and there is too much give for me to get a good launch.

It doesn't have to be my keys. It can also be the power chord to my computer. When I have big plans to write or to be productive, but forget my power chord ... it has the same effect.

Again, it is not about returning emails, or posting to Facebook, or even writing sermons ... all of that can happen later. It is about what gets exposed inside of me.

When everything goes as it should – or as planned – I not just appear to be a certain way, in a sense I actually can be that way. I like being that way! I prefer it to the alternative ... which is why it is so troubling when it doesn't work.

**Let me say it a different way: do you ever have a disproportionate response to a single**



### **comment?**

You can have a whole conversation or enjoy an entire evening ... but just one little thing gets under your skin and dominates your thoughts? Why did that one thing get so much of your energy and emotion?

Is it possible that it was the one thing you hoped no one noticed, or the one thing that you are most critical of yourself and so you don't need anyone else piling on or calling attention to it?

Disproportionate responses expose something that is going on under the surface.

This is why I am glad that we are talking about losing our keys this week. A key is so small compared to the car it starts or the house that it locks.

That small piece of metal sure carries a lot weight though. It is heavy enough to expose the façade I was trying to hold up.

Losing your keys is an opportunity for self-examination and spiritual exploration. The problem is, you usually don't know that you have lost your keys until it is time to leave! If only you had lost your keys a half-hour before you needed them...

### **Losing My Mind (Dori)**

Nearly every day I am with people who know me and forgive me. What a joyful feeling that is for someone who is a recovering open-mouth-insert-foot sufferer. I am in constant danger of thinking out loud and forgetting boundaries. There is a faux pas resting on my lips always waiting to burst out. Ta-Da!

Here is one of my daily confessions: I happily live alone. No, I live beyond alone. I live in peace and solitude: this glorious space where I don't have to speak in complete sentences or even use real words. God needs no translation. On a typical day my communion with God is about forgiveness and work and humor and relationships and aspirations and always includes watching the news. That is when I will sometimes lose my mind ... so much kvetching you wouldn't believe. Here is where God invites me to relieve the pressure; leave my pain and anger ... and I try. How else will I restore peace to my day?

I have a dear friend who proudly displays her faith in prayer with a story about a parking spot. You guessed it: she needed one, she prayed for one, she got one. I have another dear friend who must have complete control in order to have peace. She is agnostic and never speaks of prayer. I fall somewhere between these two positions. As a kid I knew not to ask for stuff and malcontent was



not tolerated. As I became independent my expectations grew until one day I had a delightful aha moment when I heard the expression “First World Problems”. It reminded me to check my perspective about “needs”.

I don’t know when it happened but one day I just decided that God is always here with me and that is enough. God does not intervene in my life. God already created me with everything I need to make things right. My job is to reach outside myself so that together, you and I can help make that so. My promise is to practice gratitude daily and to have hope in spite of the horrible things we do to each other; to have hope while knowing that the process of making things right is painfully slow.

### **We are Broken, but We are Also the Beloved of God (Charlie)**

My brokenness is something that I have intentionally made elusive in my mind. It’s not that I fool myself into believing that I am not broken, or that I put on a facade where I present myself as being “good,” but rather it is because of my own awareness of my brokenness and my fear of being vulnerable.

The sense of feeling my weaknesses, my shortcomings, my pride and my greed exposed and known terrifies me. I live in a constant fear of being fully known. I know myself. I know the darkness inside me. I do all I can to keep it from being exposed.

I confess that my fear of having my brokenness exposed to those I love, my family and friends, keeps me from having deep relationships. I confess this fear of feeling vulnerable and exposed inhibits my sense of being a beloved of God. This fear is debilitating.

Because of this fear, I am hyper-sensitive to disruption. Disruption is particularly terrifying for me because I am afraid of the disruption pushing me to a point where my weakness is exposed for all to see. So, I keep myself closed off. This is where this week’s chapter on losing one’s keys hit home.

I need to be reminded, as a member of the body of Christ, and part of the kin-dom of God that I too am beloved. That I too am desired. That I too can be healed and forgiven of holding myself apart, disrupting the possibility of shalom. I need my community of faith to help me remember, and I hope that I can help them remember this as well. We are broken, but we are also the beloved of God.

### **Honest, God Really Does Love Us! (John)**

My blog post a couple of weeks ago (Repentance is so hard!) was probably a better fit for this



week's topic of "lost keys" (mine was a lost Fitbit), but my point at that time was the revelation of unconscious ritual. In that entry I revealed how hard it is to replace unconscious habits with conscious practices that serve to remind us that we are living in the presence of the Divine.

So this week, I want to take a different tack: God loves us anyway.

Perhaps it is because I am retired, in my late 60's, have fewer demands on my time and fewer responsibilities. Perhaps it is because I am by nature an introspective person, have been meditating for 20 years, have been seeing a spiritual director monthly for 17 years. I am not nearly as anxious or stressed out about my shortcomings as I once was.

I recognize that there are many ways in which I have failed and continue to fail to be all that I could be, all that I hoped to be; failed to do all that I could do. I swear a lot, get impatient with other drivers, yell at the TV. I can embarrass myself, feel insecure. At times I can be overbearing, judgmental, dismissive. I forget that God is with me, right here, right now. God has given me gifts, abilities and opportunities that I have not utilized to their fullest. I am always surprised to find some bad habit or another that gets in my way.

But I am all that God needs me to be. That is because God loves me just as I am, regardless of who or what I am. That is God's unconditional love.

Don't get me wrong. I sincerely want to do what I can to make the world a better place. I want to teach and heal. I want to be a conduit of God's love. I do believe that I have done so and continue to do so in my own small ways. But I don't need to win God's approval or God's love. It is hard to believe or accept but both are freely given. In fact, the more I am able to accept the reality of God's love for me, the less I judge myself and the more I love myself. The more I love myself, the easier it is for me to pass on that love as freely as it was given to me. I don't need to judge or approve of others in order to love them.

Mark 12:33

*...love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.*



## Chapter 5 Eating Leftovers Finding God in Food (Katie)

I haven't had the best relationship with food. I actually don't love talking about it, because food and body image have been a source of anxiety and shame for me. The worst part about recovering from disordered eating is that unlike drugs or alcohol, you can't just quit eating. Though I've done my work in counseling and with a nutritionist to rehabilitate my relationship with food, this chapter in *Liturgy of the Ordinary* was a holy reminder that food is so much more than a simple tool to use to keep surviving.

Food is a vulnerable thing for me. It exposes my insecurities that still hide in the corners of my mind. It is also a beautiful thing—I am nourished by Portland's amazing foodie culture as well as the relationships I sustain when I share a slice of pizza or a cone of Salt & Straw ice cream with a loved one. It is the irony of ironies for someone like me who has had issues with food that God's chosen way of being remembered by God's people is through eating and drinking. Every time I come to the communion table, I am reminded of His presence and work by participating in the very activity that makes me feel so vulnerable. I experience a sense of profound intimacy when putting the bread and cup to my lips, knowing that those elements sustain my body and my heart. I am connected to the land, my body, and my community in that simple action of breaking and taking.

Though it sometimes feels like a chore or a burden to make and eat meals, I am grateful that God meets us there. I can open myself up to the help that I need in so many areas, whether it is asking my roommates about how to cook a vegetable, or praying against the lies that my body is too-much-not-enough, or practicing gratitude for the overabundance in my life that I so often neglect. I find that God and other people are the true gifts that accompany and provide my nourishment in a meal, even as insignificant as leftovers. For those reminders I am so thankful.

### Chew On This (Dori)

This I believe: Food is medicine and you **are** what you eat. This makes my personal menu a sacred document. God help my unbelief. I don't always stick to the menu. I am made up of everything I've been exposed to and my cells replace themselves all the time. Habits and Renewal ... there is hope for me after all.

I'm not sure any of us kids were "planned". We were the boomers that came after the bombs; the TV dinner generation. My parents did what they could feeding a family of seven every night but the "milk and honey" Paul spoke of was not on the menu. Baked macaroni and cheese made with Velveeta was. Hint: you don't have to make that time-stealing white sauce and Hint: you won't find it in the dairy section. It was delicious. Mom was a good cook but otherwise domestically



challenged. Whether through financial vulnerability or sheer domestic chaos, once you've experienced food insecurity you never forget.

These days my insecurities revolve around bee populations, soil health and industrial food and yet I take for granted that I will not go hungry. On an ordinary day I keep it organic and simple: cereal, an egg, fruit, soup or salad, and anything that fits on a cracker. Soup is my favorite because the work is done; just reach into the freezer which is always there and running. I take for granted that groceries will always be safe and available while being annoyed at the task of shopping. I have no leftovers, only offerings for my freezer. I do bring home a doggy bag now and then. That is a delight.

Preparing food needs time. When I have it and take it, I feel blessed. Eating can't be rushed and we have to do it every few hours. I am not surprised that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." When my blood sugar is low and I'm at my least agreeableness and most forgetfulness it takes twenty minutes for restoration to begin and for my mind to wake up. twenty minutes to chew on this: "My body broken for you". I would starve without this massive, complex, delicately balanced wonder of wonders that provides for me. I would starve without knowing that I am beloved.

I am not surprised that food is the vehicle by which Jesus asks me to chew on the word. I am slow to learn and need reminding every few hours: sacred menus lead to sacred budgets and sacred regimen and better citizenship, less waste ... enough for all.

### Mindful Eating (John)

I LOVE food! I love to cook! I love to eat! I love all kinds of food from Mexican to Chinese to leftovers to Italian! There is virtually no food that I don't like. I just don't appreciate it.

I inhale my food. A couple weeks ago I wrote about my estrangement from my body. My belly is a testament to that estrangement. I have a habit of taking large bites, one or two chews and a swallow, eager to shove in the next bite.

Last Christmas my wife gave me a book by Thich Nhat Hanh entitled, **Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life**. Great book. Or, at least, great title. I have to confess that I haven't yet read it. :(

Last week I alluded to the fact that I am introspective and have meditated for many years. Please don't be misled to think that I some sort of guru who has complete self-understanding and self-control. The truth is that, for me, self-knowledge is a never-ending quest. I know what I should do, what I need to do — in my head. But when it comes to food, I have been slow to move from my head to my heart. Now that I am retired I am working on changing those bad habits. I know in my



head how precious the food is that I ingest. I just need to slow down and appreciate it, one bite at a time.

I have to confess that my experience with the Bible is very similar to my experience with food. I LOVE Genesis and Job. But I have had a bad habit of reading the Bible like I eat my food. I rush through several chapters or an entire book, one or two chews and a swallow. Then it sits like a leaden lump in my stomach and my eagerness for the next bite quickly wanes.

But, thanks to a great group of people, that bad habit is changing. Our Wednesday night Progressive Bible Study has been studying the book of Mark for several months. We take small bites, a verse, or maybe just nibble a few words, roll them around, chew carefully and thoroughly, swallow, then savor the flavor before venturing another bite.

Oh, what a difference it makes! It allows one to appreciate the sweetness, the savory, the saltiness and occasional hint of bitterness that reveals the complexity and depth of meaning. We don't always agree on what we like or dislike. We wrestle with the words and with each other. But we always come away filled and satisfied with a deeper appreciation for scripture, for each other and for God.

I now need to treat food as I am learning to treat scripture: a sacred, precious gift from God that nourishes and sustains this precious body and soul.

Exodus 16:13-15

*13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.*

*Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat."*

### **The Wise One: On My Mom and Food (Sara)**

When I was a pre-teen, it became a singular delight to accompany my mom to bridal and baby showers, to take part, even if just perched on the floor by my mom's chair with a cup of sherbet punch balanced in my lap, in these rituals of womanhood. At one wedding shower, instead of the regular games, the organizer asked all the married women to bestow on the bride-to-be one bit of wisdom that would help her through her marriage. I don't know what the other women said, but I remember being impressed by their depth and sincerity, the spiritual significance and grand ideas they presented. When it was my mom's turn, she smiled this Cheshire-cat grin, shook her head,



and said, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” The ladies laughed as if my mom were joking, but she, born of a hearty family where food played the centerpiece of connection, was not.

To my mom, nourishment equaled love.

This was not the farm-to-table, grass-fed, sustainable, mindful, clean-eating, put-any-label-you-like-on-it nourishment of today. When my mom talked about food, it was rich food, sweet food, not necessarily healthy food, but whatever it was that would make you know she was thinking just and only of you. I forgot my lunch one day in junior high and she showed up with a peanut butter and chocolate frosting sandwich. While my brothers and dad went on Boy Scout trips, my mom and I bonded over cheap carryout and bon bons (yes, literally, bon bons, the ice cream kind). When my brothers and I hurt our dad’s feelings one day, my mom baked him “warm cookies to soothe the coldness in his heart.” (No, we kids didn’t get any of those.) In my mom’s Italian family, learning to make “the sauce” (homemade meat sauce that cooks all day) was a rite of passage for womankind; after she died, I taught my brother and he still texts me photos each time he and his wife set aside a day to do it.

My mom wasn’t much of a hugger, but food... now there is where she showed her love. It’s a thing I do, in my own foodie way, and my brothers’ families both do too. The table, and specifically the spirit in which food is prepared, we learned, is all about connection.

“At the last supper,” Tish says, “Jesus tells his disciples to eat in remembrance of him. Of all the things Jesus could have chosen to be done ‘in remembrance of him,’ Jesus chose a meal” (63).

How much sense this makes! Food is the ultimate metaphor. The nutrients sustain us. Preparation and sharing the table connect us. Giving thanks humbles and aligns us.

As much as I love the various aspects of regular Sunday worship, nothing means more to me than communion, the time when we engage together in experiencing with our physical bodies the truth that Jesus was here with us and broke bread and drank wine, and sat around a table with his friends, and connected and learned and grew. Just like we do. And the mystery that he is with us still, in this bread and this wine, in the way we live and practice at being like him. What a glorious and tangible thing.

I was certainly a little bit embarrassed all those years ago at the bridal shower when my mom brought up food while the other women had been so deep. Now though, as many of us eventually do, I realize that, far from silly and flip as she may have seemed in that moment, my mother was actually a font of tried-and-true, honest-to-goodness, real-life wonderful wisdom. And I am forever in her debt.

*A reflection on Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life, by Tish Harrison Warren,*



*chapter 5 – Eating Leftovers: Word, sacrament, & overlooked nourishment.”*

## **Leftovers Are A Gift From God (Bo)**

Last week our Sunday conversation centered around two questions:

1. What is your favorite ‘special’ meal for big occasions?
2. What is your most common meal in a month?

I loved the enthusiasm of the answers and the passion around food. It plays such an important role in our life.

I then asked if anyone’s favorite meal was ‘leftovers’. It was not.

Leftovers are one of those things that get taken for granted. Leftovers fall into one of those categories about which I say:

“This is a 1st world problem ... but it is still a problem.”

I know that leftovers are rarely inspiring or exciting ... but they are a gift.

Leftovers say “there is more than enough”.

There *is* more than enough. That is the amazing part of life in the 21st century. If you have leftovers – you have been *graced by a gift*.

**There seems to be something significant about leftovers in the Bible as well.**

Every time Jesus has anything to do with meals, there is an abundance. This is especially true in the multiplication narratives of loaves and fishes.

It is an odd echo of a story from the Hebrew Testament where God provides *manna* for the people -but the opposite! They are to collect only what they need and if they try to preserve more overnight it will spoil. “Take only what you need and only enough for today” so that there were no leftovers.

My encouragement to you this week is try a new discipline: be overly aware of leftover – either think of who you might share them with or give double thanks for them when you get to enjoy them



that second time.

## **Chapter 6 Fighting Well**

### **Fighting Well (sermon notes)**

You may be aware that sometimes people are unhappy or don't like everything going on at church.

A popular way of talking about conflict styles is to break them up into 3 categories:

1. Flight
2. Fright
3. Fight

I'm always surprised at the fairly even distribution of these 3 responses in any group. It makes sense why conflict is so difficult – because we respond to it in so many different ways.

**It is important that we handle conflict well as a congregation (also true for families or the larger community).**

If we handle conflict well then our story keeps going. If we don't things can come crashing to a halt.

Here are the 3 principles that I have found for handling conflict well in community:

- Matthew 18 Principle
- Nothing Negative by Email
- In church, people have names

**Matthew 18 Principle:** Jesus says that if you have something against another person there are 3 stages to the sequence.

First, go to them. Give them a chance to repent. They might not even know that they have done anything wrong.

Second, if they won't listen to you, bring one of two other people to make to help navigate between you.

Third, if they still won't listen, then you can bring it to the larger community

The heart behind Matthew 18 is “keep the circle small so that the person can stay in community”.

**Nothing Negative by Email:** Email is great for updates and for setting up meetings. It is not great for venting or ranting. As tough as this is, if you are upset at someone you are going to have to call them. At most, you can email them to set up a time and let them know that it is serious or that you have concerns.



**In church, people have names:** Unnamed people have a magical ability to multiply. One upset person who does not follow Matthew 18 and instead talks to 4 other people somehow becomes FOUR upset people and now you have a faction or worse yet a mob when in reality you just have one person with hurt feelings or having a bad day.

An easy solution is to simply use names. “John didn’t like the sermon today” is different than John telling 4 people and it gets reported that “People didn’t like the sermon today”.

I wouldn’t labor this point except to repeat how consequential all of this can be: If we handle conflict well then our story keeps going. If we don’t things can come crashing to a halt. It allows us to walk forward together: in faith, in humility, and in community.

### **Passing the Peace and Slamming the Doors (Bryan)**

Our bedroom door in our last house, the house where we raised our girls to adulthood, had cracks shivering up the plaster. Those cracks came from a particularly furious fight between my wife and me. I don’t remember the specifics but given the timeframe, I’m sure it was about how were we going to pay for college, or our usual fight about discipline and boundaries (me) vs. love and nurture (her), but at bottom most of these fights started and ended the same way — with one of us saying, “do whatever you want — that is what is going to happen anyway.”

The fights were about the chasm between our abilities to be the parents we wanted to believe we were, and the parents that realities of time, money, and energy allowed us to be. The fights were echoes of our own inadequacies projected starkly onto each other.

Tish Harrison Warren speaks of her marital disputes in a framework of ‘Passing the Peace’ and how hard that is to do with the people most familiar to us. Her thesis is that marriage, parenting, these are proving grounds for living as the peacemakers Jesus commanded.

It is easy to see that we need to tackle the grand dreams of a peaceful world — we need to fund UMCOR with as many pennies as we can spare — we need to disarm this world of the terrible weapons that have proliferated into the hands of madmen — we need to find common ground with the people with whom we disagree most ardently. All of this is obvious, but as Tish points out, Jesus’ last night of freedom was spent washing the feet of his friends, including the one who would soon betray him. Being a peacemaker in the mundane, with those closest to you can be the hardest task we have been called to.

Our children have grown into adulthood well, probably because they were smart enough to navigate between an authoritarian and a comforter and find the best possible traits from both parents. The fights we had seem to have greyed into the horizon while the love and support have



been the things they remember most brightly. The slammed door is forgotten and each hug is cherished. In spite of ourselves — we Passed the Peace.

### **Confessions of a Peacefaker (Katie)**

I like to think that I'm a "peacemaker." I live my life in hopes of creating and keeping peaceful, beautiful, sacred spaces for and around my relationships. I want to make people feel safe to speak with me—to share their stories and lives. I want to be an empathetic listener, for I believe that it is through less speaking and more listening that the world's hurts will be healed.

However, I fall short of my goals more often than I like. My instructor for a pastoral counseling class last week called the tendency to smooth over conflicts without actually dealing with them "peacefaking." I mourn how easy it is to be a peacefaker—talking the talk of God's peace and shalom without walking the walk. I find it easiest to be a peacefaker within my own heart. Sometimes it's easier to push the pain down—to hide my wounds for the sake of a fragile veneer of happiness or contentment.

But that is not a healthy way to live. Instead, we are invited by God to attend to the conflicts within and among ourselves and our neighbors. With the help of our Comforter Holy Spirit, in attending to our darkness, we may find the sharp edges of conflict softened. We may look into ourselves and into others with generosity and see that we are all just trying to do our best. God is in the business of redemption, and we are invited into this fruitful, world-changing work that starts right here with us—if we're willing.

### **Peaceeverywhere (Dori)**

A bookstore (not just any bookstore...one with a good news stand) is where I feel the "Peace of the city" that Jeremiah mentions in 29.7. And yet, it's in the bookstore where I come face to face with my responsibilities; the ones of which I fall short: curiosity, activism. My bumper sticker says "FREEDOM". If you don't read, you ain't free. I don't read, not enough. But when I am in a bookstore I know there is hope for a better world.

I have witnessed ugly, anxiety driven fights. I've heard arguments based on conflicted interests. I have been to thought provoking debates and I've imagined deep conversations where I always prevail with the Truth. None of these scenarios constitute a peaceful resolution. It takes more: more reading, more questioning, more voting, more deep conversations where feelings are not hurt so easily, so willingly.



It is I who wears a peace sign, who is at times a source of conflict.

It is I who bears a bumper sticker "Peaceeverywhere" yet may cut you off unknowingly.

It is I who screams "Serenity Now!" at all the damn litter on the Alberta exit off the I5.

It is I who has conflicts about intimacy, commitment and identity; about being misunderstood, unknown ... at no ones fault but my own. My love runs deep but my efforts toward intimacy are shallow. I avoid rejection, unwilling to reveal my ugly cry.

It is I who has hope that I am who I am ... that We can bear it well.



## **Chapter 7 Checking Email**

### **Ora et Labora and the Inbox (Bryan)**

email. Finally a subject I am a verified consultant level expert on — I have written articles and taught classes on managing your Inbox effectively. But, [Tish Harrison Warren](#) is one of the many people who would find my advice and counsel less than helpful. Her chapter on how she finds it unpleasant when opening her Inbox speaks to a growing sense of helplessness in a flood of technology sent to rob us of our efficacy, our productivity, our self-worth.

Saint Benedict spoke of Ora et Labora or the “Prayer and Work” which was often applied to the farming of a monastery plot. The notion that there exists simple divinity in prayerfully turning the earth daily for the greater good. But here is the problem with attempting to apply the Ora et Labora of a vegetable plot to our Inbox. The garden has a border.

We all feel acutely overwhelmed by our daily tasks. In our lifetime, technology has multiplied that molehill of mundanity to a mountain. Our desire to be the best Christian we can be through a job well done is constantly undercut by a never ending flood of reminders, spam, checklists, meeting invites and declines. All seemingly designed to distract from the real job of just getting things done.

Here is my gift to you; most of it, you can skip. You can ignore everything beyond the borders you draw. Turn the earth that is in your garden and let the rest go to seed. Answer your mother’s e-mail about what to get your sister for her birthday (this is clearly in your garden) — ignore the note asking you and ten other people what should be done about the missed deadline on a project (somebody else will answer, I promise).

In this daily deluge — we often forget to ask ourselves how much of this is really relevant. All this connectedness has gotten in the way of being connected. I know it hurts your Protestant work ethic, but trust me on this — sometimes you should take solace in a job not done. Sometimes the Ora et Labora only applies up to the edge of the garden. That urgent message about the upcoming sales demo — that is over in the brambles, not in your garden.

### **Practicing Presence (Katie)**

This week’s chapter about email, blessing, and sending reminded me of my favorite saint and mystic—Brother Lawrence. Born in the seventeenth century in France, Brother Lawrence was a Benedictine monk who lived and worked in a monastery in the kitchen and as a sandal maker for most of his life after sustaining an injury in the Thirty Years War. The main theme in his life was *practicing the presence of God*. This means that in whatever task he was doing, whether it was



laboring in the kitchen or hunching over a tattered shoe or drinking deeply from a cup of wine, he acknowledged God's presence and offered himself to the Divine.

Basically, this is a sustained discipline of offering ourselves to God. It might sound daunting and difficult, but what this practice does is reorient our hearts to see that every movement we make can be worship to the God who gives and sustains our lives. Plus, grace abounds when we fumble with our prayer practices and offerings of ourselves. Lawrence wrote, "A little lifting of the heart suffices; a little remembrance of God, one act of inward worship are prayers which, however short, are nevertheless acceptable to God."

This practice of God's presence allows us to look around and realize that our feet always rest on holy ground. All work, even checking email or deep-cleaning the oven, when done with love, is good work. As Brother Lawrence said, "We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed."

May we be faithful in the practice and the doing.

### Help (Dori)

I was six in 1960 when my baby was born. Oops! I mean when my mother's baby was born. I am told that I wanted to "take over". Remembering back as far as I can, I hear a little girl responding, "*Someone* has to".

My parents were never fully organized for a brood of five. Mom had been given responsibility for all our domestic needs, was poor to delegate and was co-owner of an ever growing hoard of stuff. It was chaos. Dad worked all day and absolved himself of anything to do with our "decor". I was an unhappy child that played in other people's homes. One summer spent with Mom's mom and I began to understand that Mom wasn't going to change. So upon my return I took matters into my own hands. I would become the help my parents needed. This did not always turn out well. Mom made some horrific discoveries: not all my decisions about trash (what was and what wasn't) were helpful. But I was honing my skills and growing a sense of satisfaction every time I made order out of chaos. I didn't care that big brother would tease me with the nickname "Suzy Homemaker". I was filling a hole in my soul.

My zest for order became an asset which drew me into employment that demands it. I discovered the thrill of a balanced report: You make a place for numbers then put every number in its place. A balanced report at month end is what I look forward to but don't always get. A clean and orderly house is what I look forward to but never achieve. Oh, Spirit fall upon me and be my own help today!



Order cannot be used as an excuse to avoid higher priorities but it cannot be neglected either. Order is a craft, a balancing act and it takes practice. It IS a practice but not a regimen so strict that it cannot be followed. Order is just putting one step in front of the other; the daily grind, the steady drum beat.

With every scrap of waste I recycle, I know I am blessed and sent for this very thing; to put the world in order. With every step toward further simplicity as I age I hear the voice, “Someone has to.”

### **Finding the Divine in the Descent towards Nihilism (Charlie)**

I don’t know what it is about the season of life that I feel is just beginning to blossom before me, but I feel unusually drawn to a sarcastic and seemingly nihilistic outlook to much of life. The odd thing about this, is that I feel like feeling this is truer to myself, than the me that tries to be hopeful, the me that tries to do what is expected. The issue for me in this time, is that I hear voices all around saying sarcasm and nihilism are symptomatic of a broken spirit or dis-integrated emotions.

The idea that anything I’m doing can be holy and sacred, or “spiritual,” has never bothered me. I prefer it over the notion that certain vocations, or activities, are more holy than others. That isn’t to say that there aren’t activities where one may be able to rightfully claim that they are “less holy,” than others, but these are few and far between in my opinion. For the most part, there is not reason why gardening, washing the dishes, checking email, or vacuuming can’t be done in such a way as to honor God. But there is a difference, for me at least, in acknowledging that nearly all vocations can be done in such a way where they become sacred and living this in my life.

I work for a grocery store. It’s a part-time job that allows me to be a full-time graduate student. Even though it is part-time, the job still takes up much of my time. It’s also a job that is very difficult to encounter the divine. It is very easy for me to slip into a mindset where I feel like everything I do is meaningless there. The store is understaffed and has an insane turn-over rate. Whatever I do one day, still needs to be done the next. There will always be more product to break down from pallets. There will always be more stocking to do. There will always be more to do. The job is never done. I don’t know how to see the divine in this place. God is there, I just don’t know how to find God.

Maybe that explains my adoption of more nihilistic thinking. It may not be all meaninglessness. The descent into nihilism can be a place where encountering the Divine is possible.

### **The “therefore, go”-ness of it all (Sara)**



It was late spring last year, around this time maybe, and I happened to be at one of those proverbial crossroads in life. If we can stay in metaphor-land for a minute, I had limped and scratched and scabbled my way to that crossroads and I couldn't seem to make it any further but plopped down in the dust with the contents of my backpack splayed all around. I didn't know at all how to pick up and keep moving so I sat there still, maybe even defeated.

And yet...

Back in the real world, I was going to work every day at a good job, with people that I really liked, a boss who appreciated me, and doing work that could certainly be construed as meaningful. Also during that time, through nothing short of a modern-day miracle, I had taken up residence in a carriage house on the property of a darling, generous friend in beautiful home set on acres of land in the middle of a thriving St. Louis suburb. And there was a pool – a really good one. It was heated in the spring, so beginning early in the season, I would come home from work, float on my back and let the water slosh in my ears while I closed my eyes and spent time with my worn-out self on that dusty road, staring with broken confusion at the things of life scattered around me.

I was floating one day, and worrying. As usual. That day, it was about the “therefore, go”-ness of it all. “How,” I asked God, bold as if I were floating next to and conversing with one of my best girlfriends, “am I, being the me that I am, supposed to ‘therefore, go’?” I’m not an evangelist in a stand-on-the-street-corner, witness-to-my-hairdresser way, not an evangelist in the way I was raised to be. The aggressive, soul-saving, hell-fire teachings of my childhood were a large part of the confusion that drove me from religion as a young adult. Now that I had opened the door again to (consciously) invite God into my everyday life, how was I supposed to interpret the mission, or sending out? And as quick as I asked the question and stood up from my float to retrieve a ball one of my friend's dogs had dropped in the pool, just as average as the way I tossed the ball and watched Eddie chase it through the grass, I felt an answer bubble up, like a casual response from that girlfriend swimming along with me, “Write and pray, Sara. That's your way.” *Oh, right*, I thought. *Of course*. I went back into my float, breathing deep and staring at the giant true-blue sky, smiling and handing the me on the dusty road a cup of cool water.

There was a lot in flux at that moment in life, and many things have now begun to settle out, so I can look back with at least a bit of perspective. One of the fruits of that day in the pool/that time spent on the road is a clarity that prayer is a way of life. I Thessalonians 5:17 says “Pray without ceasing.” In a 2015 Washington Times article, Barry Black, chaplain of the US Senate, wrote: “The Greek word for ‘without ceasing’ [here] ...doesn't mean nonstop — but actually means constantly recurring. In other words, we can punctuate our moments with intervals of recurring prayer.”

I've long thought of my life's vocation as writing, and fantasized (and prayed for) a time when that vocation would line up with an everyday-life kind of career, but with that swimming pool epiphany floating around in my head, I wonder... what if praying is my vocation too? I've been doing it in a “constantly recurring” way for years, as a means of survival, a surrender that gets me to the next



moment, and the next, and the next. And what if praying *is* part of my response to the sending out, my *action* of daily “therefore, go”-ing?

Tish says, “Holiness itself is something like a craft — not an abstract state to which we ascend, but an earthy wisdom and love that is part and parcel of how we spend our day” (94). I think she’s got that right. Doing my everyday life work of responding to emails, creating marketing materials, filing paperwork, planning events, answering the phone, and acting as a sounding board to for the people around me — all in an attitude of ceaseless prayer is one of my ways of being sent, of living out the great commission, of embracing that *missio Dei*.

I did eventually get up out of the dirt and keep on walking the path, and that backpack is feeling lighter most days now. But it does still get heavy, and whether I feel the weight or not, I’m asking for help every step of the way. Vocation or moment-to-moment plea, this praying without ceasing thing has become a way of life and I like to think it matters beyond my own little mixed-up, dusty-road, sometimes great-big-swimming-pool world.

Well, from my lips to God’s ears, as they say. Amen and amen.

—

A reflection on *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, by Tish Harrison Warren. Chapter 7, “Checking Email: Blessing and Sending.”

### **A Week Without Email (Bo)**

A week in the woods is good for my soul. I look forward to my annual May camping trip and this year did not disappoint.

This year had an extra interesting wrinkle. The Sunday before I left on the trip, I gave a short homily about email entitled, “too much of a good thing”. (It was the topic in our book series *Sacred Everyday* based on *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, by Tish Harrison Warren.)

I also did something for the first time ever: I set an automated away-message for email.

It was surprisingly liberating!

So now I am back in the office, catching up on emails, and I am having a blast reading the posts I missed from our writing team.



I hope that they help and inspire you as much as they did me.

I love doing church as team!



## Chapter 8 Sitting in Traffic Faith in Real Time (Katie)

In this chapter of *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, Tish Harrison Warren writes about the ways of waiting by using traffic as an illustration. She says how, when we're stuck in traffic on I-5 or 217, we are best reflecting our embodiment as people of faith—we're on a journey to somewhere, with no control over God's time.

I hated that metaphor for the accuracy of it.

That's not just because I don't like traffic (does anyone really?). It cuts to the core of my inherent impatience. In our instant-gratification society, I am accustomed to finding solutions to my problems with a few clicks of an internet search. My brain craves the hits of serotonin I get when I see the little red notifications from Facebook or Instagram after posting something. I *love* the satisfaction of getting results.

But faith is not about results. Faith cannot be forced or rushed. Patience cannot be perfected, only practiced. And patience in waiting is so *hard*.

As a young girl and into adulthood, my friends and I would talk constantly about how we couldn't *wait* to meet our future spouse, or get married, or have a baby, or get our dream job, or travel the world, or fill in the blank. It can almost be easier to inhabit a season of anticipation rather than to be present in the moment at hand. But that is the beauty of faith—that we can ask the question that I've carried in my back pocket for the better part of a year from one of Bo's first sermons at Vermont Hills—"What is it time *for*?"

I hope to orient my life around the spirit of that question—to evaluate and reevaluate where I am and what I'm doing, and to spend my time in worthy ways. In traffic, instead of screaming at people to get off of their phones and DRIVE already oh my g—(yeah, guilty), it might be time for some humble acceptance of where I am through prayer. Instead of resenting unwanted seasons of my life, it might be time for practicing God's presence and finding that everywhere I stand is holy ground. Even I-5.

Our time is limited. May we inhabit it well. Amen.

### It's About Time (Dori)

It's about the who, what, where, and why of Time, otherwise known as the Here and Now. Like Gulliver I too could be accused by the Lilliputians of idolizing my watch. Now it displays not only the



time but my Calendar and my sacred To Do List and that's even better.

My dad's big advice was "Plan your work then work your plan" so I was delighted to discover Ember Days: a Christian practice of setting aside time during the Equinox and Solstice for reflection on the past and the future; making time to plan time, and to declare a purpose going forward. But for all the value I put into doing, I spend a lot of time waiting. What's the delay?

If my life went according to plan I would be a super woman by now but there is a disconnect: It never happens like the plan. I have failed to train the dragon, I merely hold it at bay protecting myself from stepping too deep into any one ditch. I honor my commitments to others and I value being on time but for myself, not so much. I put things off regularly. I use distractions to avoid higher priorities. I spend an incredible amount of time waiting ... on what I do not know.

As I walk the 1.8 miles to church, I wait the 50 minutes it takes to do it. If I happen upon some manna along the way, it's not because I was waiting for or expecting it. I'm at a loss as to what it is I've lost.

I am told I am waiting to die. I wait for one body part or another to get better and when it eventually won't I'll wait for the "next stage". I wait not *on* God but rather I wait *with* God. It feels much more like resting than waiting. I don't have a belief about anything that happens after I die, I only have belief about the actions I take while I live and yet I spend a lot of time resting, content to let the mystery unfold.

### Wabi-sabi (Sara)

I recently finished reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*, an insanely long, intricately plotted tome of a book swelling with revenge and pain, drama and swashbuckling, unexpected softness and love. If I had to tell you the theme of the eleven-hundred-some-odd pages, it would be the three words Edmond Dantes (aka the count) speaks, as the story comes to a close, to encourage the young man he loves as a son: "Wait and hope."

Tish echoes this in describing how the liturgical calendar shapes her life. "I practice year after year," she writes, "waiting and hoping" (108).

I think maybe this is the theme of our lives, period. Right? So much more of our time is spent in the waiting than in the... wait, what else is it that we do?

—

A few years ago, while visiting Southern California in the wake of treatment for ovarian cancer, I



went to church with my aunt and cousin. I was not in a great place. Tired, and tired of being tired, and tired of waiting for this whole thing to be over. (By the way, this “whole thing” is never over; this whole waiting thing... this is life.) That morning at church, my aunt asked her friend, Peter, to pray for me. Among other scriptures, Peter prayed Isaiah 40:31: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint.”

Waiting doesn't mean that nothing is happening. Tish writes, “God is at work in and through us as we wait. Our waiting is active and purposeful... a fallow field is never dormant. As dirt sits waiting for things to be planted and grown, there is work being done invisibly and silently...leaven[ing] the soil, making it richer and better” (111).

We must wait, for in the waiting our strength is renewed. Over and over again.

—

One day, in the very thick of it, my therapist said to me, enigmatic smile and single lifted eyebrow, “So, you're telling me you want things to hurry up and get meaningful?” “Yes!” I said laughing and crying at the same time. “Is that so wrong?”

—

Twenty-some years ago, I read a vignette written by a Buddhist teacher; it has stuck with me year after year after year. (I believe it was Thich Nhat Hanh in a tiny little volume called *Being Peace*.) He said, when we get frustrated and harried – perhaps when we're stuck in traffic, it is good to remind ourselves of this: “I am exactly where I need to be.”

I practice this in meditation. From the time I close my eyes till the time I hear the ending chime, I practice the understanding that, yes, *I am exactly where I need to be*. I don't need to feel rushed because it won't speed up the timer and *I am exactly where I need to be*. I don't need to worry about the next thing in my day because *I am exactly where I need to be*.

Side note: it is impossible to say that sentence too many times.

—

Waiting is an end in itself. There is *action* in the waiting. Anticipation. Preparation. Tish writes, “We are oriented to our future hope, yet we do not try to escape from our present reality, from the real and present brokenness and suffering in the world” (112). We must wait with attention and intention toward the, often overwhelming, reality of things.

There *is* no escape from it. But, the meditation helps.



—  
I think that's the end of this post. Oh, were you waiting for me to get to the point?

—  
As Tish quotes her friend Jan, "I was waiting *for* the gift. But I've come to see that the waiting *is* the gift" (emphasis added).

—  
You're welcome.

### **40 Years, Stuck in Traffic (John)**

A few months after my beloved grandfather died in 1975 I had a dream where I saw Jesus. I spent the next several years looking for people with whom I could explore my dream. What I encountered was one of two reactions: people either nodded, said "Uh huh" and slowly backed away, or they got excited and proceed to tell me that I had met the real, literal Jesus and told me I had to accept him as my personal saviour to insure my salvation and passage into heaven. Neither response was satisfying.

After 20 or so years I had two opportunities that vastly expanded my experience of the divine: I participated in a 4 year program at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland called "Seeking God in the 21st Century" which featured world-renowned progressed Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other speakers such as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Huston Smith, Rabi Ari Hershfield, William Sloan Coffin and many others. At the same time I joined a small group of people who worked for a while with an African shaman, attended a Lakota Sun Dance and gathered together twice a month to meditate.

In the latter group, Spirit would occasionally speak to me. When I would ask how I could share my encounter with Jesus and my growing relationship with Spirit with more people, Spirit would always respond with, "Patience."

It took another 20 years. In that time I had joined the UMC, burned out and dropped out, then reengaged as the church was dwindling to a few remaining faithful souls. Just as I was beginning to give up all hope that I could find what I was seeking in the church a seismic shift occurred: we had a sudden and unexpected change in pastors, we completely renovated sanctuary and the worship experience and gained several new exciting, fantastic, enthusiastic, and progressive members.



I now have a church and a group of people with whom I can discuss my dream of Jesus with open minds and willingness to wrestle with God and with each other. It took “sitting in traffic” for 40 years (not always patiently) to finally arrive at my destination.



## **Chapter 9 Calling a Friend**

### **Dimensions for a Communion Table (Bryan)**

Let's build a Communion Table together, shall we. The first one was about six friends long on a side, and at least one Jesus wide at the end. Today, our table needs to accommodate all my friends — Virginia, Peter, Eddie, Rob, Rachel, Quinn, Katie, Donna, Zach, Bo, Charlie, Sean, Charlie, Ehow, Joe, Joe, Joseph, Craig, Andrew, Sara... okay, so let's just do a rounding estimate here that I probably need to make the table at least a three or four hundred friends on a side. I'll have to call Home Depot and make a special order for that much wood.

Rob is a friend I met at couple's bible study 25 years ago. He and I immediately hit it off as we have the kind of conversations that good Christian boys with hints of dark humor can have. We make the jokes about gluten-free transubstantiation that only he and I think are funny. I love Rob like a brother. He will probably want to bring his friends too. I know one of his mentors is Charlie Spears, who was the Campus Minister at Tulsa U Wesleyan Foundation for 40 years. If Charlie comes and brings his friends, we are probably up in the five digit range. Let's see, 20000 divided by four edges is about 5000 people on a side. Maybe I should be thinking about alternate materials.

Charlie Spears, got into Campus Ministry following the guidance of Bill Bright who founded Campus Crusades. Bill Bright was friends with Billy Graham. These friends stretch backwards over the centuries all the way to that first Upper Room table and forward into the future rippling out to all the friends of friends of friends with which we have communed spiritually, personally, and in the case of Rob and me, comically. I hope that great-grandchildren of my fifth grade Sunday school kids will be there.

This is what it means to be at Communion. The elements are the draw, but the real power of a community of faith is in the number of elbows on the table. Paraphrasing Tish Harrison Warren, I know I will be with friends at that big table and I hope I am near the butter.

### **The Living-ness of the Church (Katie)**

The Church is one of my very favorite things about this wild, broken, beautiful faith of mine. I've treasured a quote from a theologian I follow on Twitter named Broderick Greer who said, "The Church isn't 'cute' or 'inspirational.' It is the living, mangled, and risen Body of Christ." It is a Body of people—real people with hearts and wounds and favorite colors and preferred sides of the bed. The Church is my family, my home. The Church has saved my life.

One of my most significant instances of this was during one of the darkest seasons of my life.



Three years ago I had just moved back to Dallas, TX after spending three months in Costa Rica. I'd come home early from my study abroad program due to my rapidly disintegrating mental health, and was a ghost of a person. I knew that my sanity and stability depended on finding a community of people to support me (along with help from my amazing parents, the right anti-depressant, and lots and lots of therapy). In the midst of my fragility and woundedness, I took a risk and showed up at a women's small group for a church in my area. I was the youngest there by a few years, and definitely the least stable, but I chose honesty over a façade and told them what I needed: a community. Friends. Love. Support for my long road of healing.

And in the true fashion of the Church, these women showed up for me. They embodied what love looks like by opening their arms and homes—by checking in with me, taking me to coffee, feeding me meals, praying with and for me, and meaning it when they asked, “How are you?”. On one unforgettable night they literally held me as I wept over the waves of trauma that had crashed over me that year. Their hands and prayers held me together.

Those women, the Church, helped walk me back to life in that season. They witnessed my process of healing by continuing to show up for me, week after week, in prayer, worship, and friendship. They shared in my victories and sat with me in my losses. They loved and continue to love me, as they are called to do.

I pray that this example of the Church can be extended to everyone who needs that kind of love. I pray that we are always responsive to those calls—that our eyes and ears could be drawn to those who need love most. It will always be messy—relationships and bodies always are. But my, I am so grateful for the living-ness of it. May we always choose that Life and love that is offered to us in this faith of ours. Amen.

### **Receiving a Call (Dori)**

Have I told you the story about our little household of two receiving the call of puberty and menopause at the same time? I'll save that for another day.

Reading to my young Anna and raising her up with all the good wisdom I could muster was living in a thin place, close to God. We discovered Good vs. Evil in the fists full of books we would devour and, with much help, we taught her that Goodness was God-ness; the only way to be.

Goodness is under attack. More like an ugly, self-inflicted, downward spiral of destruction caused by hate, fear, lies, and greed followed by fatigue and ignorance. A perfect storm of evil where the only peace one finds is through victory, a punitive, angry victory. Every generation has to be taught the folly of this kind of suffering. I let my bumper sticker speak for me, “Defunding Education is Defeating the Future”



My dad would say, “Don’t make waves” (he was a Navy man). I felt the need to keep an even keel: not a lot of questioning, no debate, no bias analysis . . . no self examination, just Dad’s attempt at humor through sarcasm and Mom’s exhaustion. It was the dawning of the age of television, a deflection away from intimacy. Just another one of the many tests that form us into who we are. Some we pass with flying colors.

I learned about Peace through Justice, an attempt at knowing the Truth. An attempt at least, at knowing myself well enough and at knowing to whom and what I will say, “Yes” when I hear the many callings. I vote for Good. I vote with my body. If I carry any invasive barnacles of entitlement or ingratitude I go back to the dock for a check-up. Yes is not a place to be without humility. Yes is a test: It is a place where we save each other from waves of repeating mistakes as the tides of our actions carry us ever so slowly into the Kin-dom.

This past year We have said Yes to more security, a new pastor, a remodeling project and for me, extra accounting challenges. We don’t walk away from something that is broken or challenging or changing, or because we think our absence would go unnoticed.

Yes is not easy and it keeps me alive.

### **The Gifts of Friends (John)**

Tish Warren’s topic this week is “Calling a Friend.” Just now I was listening to a panel discussion on NPR about the suicides of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade. When asked about the causes for the 30% increase in suicides from 1996 to 2016, Dr. Nadine Kaslow, former president of the American Psychological Assn. said:

*...things have become less personal. Our communities have become less tight-knit, and it’s much more individualized and much less focused on our communities and our neighborhoods and reaching out to each other.*

When I was in elementary school I was the target of incessant bullying. I’ve often reflected that had I been born a couple of generations later I might have been a candidate for childhood suicide. Fortunately I lived next door to a very good friend, my grandfather. While my parents could not understand my angst, or at least had no idea how to respond to it, my grandfather was always there to listen and to give me the encouragement I needed to persevere.

Perhaps because of those early school years, I had few friends in junior high or high school. My



one close friend from college and I drifted apart after college; a few years after losing contact with him I heard that he had died, alone and lonely.

I did fall in love and got married soon after college. I considered my wife to be my best friend. However, I discovered that is an impossibly heavy burden to put on one's spouse at the same time she is trying to raise two young children and to be the soul bread winner — because I'd gone bankrupt on a failed business venture after going two years without a salary and later got fired over a disagreement with a boss. It very nearly cost me my marriage. That was a very desperate and lonely time in my life.

My road to recovery started with getting involved with the Men's Movement of the late 1980's. I soon discovered that there were many men who felt lonely and isolated. This eventually led to my joining the small group of people that I mentioned in an earlier blog. For the last 20 years we have gathered together twice a month to meditate.

Ours is a deeply spiritual, nature-based practice patterned after the "shamanic journey" practiced by indigenous shamans around the world for thousands of years. We are a very eclectic group: a Buddhist, a 7th day Adventist, an Episcopalian, a lapsed Catholic and a Methodist. Over the years we have developed a deep and loving trust for each other and with Spirit. This relationship, and my family, have been my anchors for many years.

This brings me to the current day. I am very excited about the different way we at Vermont Hills are doing church. I believe this new "conversational" style of worship is helping break down the barriers of isolation of modern Western society. It is encouraging a rediscovery of interpersonal relationships, of allowing ourselves to open up and risk being vulnerable in a supportive environment in God's presence. It is giving us an opportunity to share our doubts and fears, our hopes and aspirations with each other and with God.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.*

### **Martin Sheen & Mystery (Sara)**

I've long been a fan of Krista Tippett's radio show, *On Being*. A few years ago, soon after I'd started attending church again after a 20-odd year hiatus, I grew particularly enamored of Krista's interview with Martin Sheen. It seemed strange to me at first, not knowing anything about Sheen's



faith life, that he'd be on the show. After I listened to the interview once though, I went back to it again and again, mostly to experience the child-like liveliness and apparent joy of his belief.

During one section of the interview, Sheen talks about communion, and the way he describes the sensation of *love* in taking that meal together gets me every time.

"Whoever the crowd is I'm getting on line with, you just look at the people who are on that line, that community. That is the greatest and simplest expression of... trying to explain this mystery... I never ever can get over it. It's just something you have to surrender to. And just saying yeah, I'm with them. That's the community of saints" ([www.onbeing.org](http://www.onbeing.org). 12/16/2015).

It's the way he talks about "the community of saints," that I want to hear over and over, the warmth of connection in his voice – there's almost a chuckle underneath, a well-doesn't-this-just-beat-all kind of chuckle. It's an expression of clear and grateful wonder at being a part of a body much bigger than ever we can see.

Tish gets at this when she writes about her former priest who, "asked us to imagine the communion table stretching on for miles, to remind us that when we take communion, we mysteriously feast with all those who are in Christ" (119).

There is something overpoweringly connecting about it, about standing eye to eye with a person sharing the bread and the cup, about the long string of us, all together, all the same in our humanity and our humility, stepping forward to receive what is offered in grace.

The Gathering is the church I was active with in St. Louis, the church I came to after that long hiatus; they celebrate communion every week. For the first five or six weeks I attended church there, I stepped carefully to the side as the other congregants made their way forward to receive the bread and wine. I didn't go myself because I wasn't sure what I believed, and I understood fully the importance of this act, the symbolism and power of it.

The day I chose to participate was so average and so momentous. I walked into church and found my way to what was becoming my usual spot. I hadn't yet decided whether I'd take communion when it was time. Later in the service, as people began to proceed, since I sat near the back, I had some time to think. Part of the liturgy that was spoken and, at that church sung, every week as a lead-up to communion included this:

**Pastor:** And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the *mystery of our faith* (emphasis added).

**Congregation:** Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.



As I stood there trying to puzzle out whether to step aside again or move into the line, I thought, *Do I believe this?* From deep inside, I felt a simple, *Yes*. Then I asked, *Do I want to be a part of this?* And by “this,” I meant, this following Jesus thing, this being a part of the “community of saints” thing, this not doing life alone, but in kinship with people who believe in the inexplicable divine mystery that doesn’t make a lot of practical sense thing. *Yes*, I thought. Solidly, quietly, calmly, *Yes*. I wanted to proclaim, with these people, the *mystery of our faith*. I went forward, surrendering to the unknowability.

This is one of the things I love about communion, the understanding that what we’re doing there together is *mysterious* and also powerful. It doesn’t make head-sense, but it makes so much heart-sense, so much in-this-together sense, so much we-are-not-doing-life-alone sense. We are, together, part of a body; in community, we are so much more than our own little parts.

We are, as I can hear in Martin Sheen’s voice during that *On Being* interview a mysterious, joyous, childlike wonder.

A reflection on *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, by Tish Harrison Warren. “Chapter 9, Calling a Friend: Congregation and Community”



## **Chapter 10 Drinking Tea**

### **Sacrarium Spiritus Beati Oculi (Bryan)**

The little things that give us joy. Finding those in the quiet moments is the charge from Tish Harrison Warren’s chapter, ‘Drinking Tea: Sanctuary and Savoring’.

For me this is easy — my wife’s eyes crinkle at the corner when she smiles. She smiles a lot — a little less now that we are in our older years and her knees hurt and the kids are farther away and the Portland rain persists, but when she listens to her music, meets a friend, or gets a call from a daughter the corners of her face spread into tiny archipelagos of joy. It was one of the first things I noticed about her, and I resolved to make her as happy as I could as often as I could.

Some people find the divine creation in a butterfly on a flower, or a rainbow. I collect jokes and funny stories specifically so I can tell them to my wife. Even when I am teasing her with one of my many torturous pranks, she flattens out her lips and looks down her nose at me, but her crinkles always give her away. When we are driving, I have taken to reaching over and stroking the back of her hand so she brightens up a little.

These are my little moments of joy and sanctuary. When Virginia smiles it is my own private sacrament. If God can make those eyes that betray a giddy joy in the universe then I am lucky enough to be the chief priest of cheer.

### **Habits of Adoration (Katie)**

In the course of my life so far, I have developed and leaned into what Tish Harrison Warren calls “habits of adoration” in her chapter on sanctuary and savoring. God wired me with an eye for beauty and a heart tuned to wonder. My personality lends itself to delight, and if you know me well, you know that well. Whether it’s closing my eyes when I taste something delicious, or cheering aloud every time I see Mount Hood, or completely losing myself in joy and worship at a Rocket Summer or Oh Hellos live show, I let my whole heart and body experience a sense of holy joy at the beauty of existence. I’ve learned how to channel the depth of my emotion into a healthy appreciation for good and beautiful things—for a good and beautiful God who created so much richness, even alongside the pain and darkness.

I’ll include a poem I wrote during college in Austin, Texas about 4 years ago after walking from my bus stop to my house after a long day of classes where I found God’s beauty in my little neighborhood.

“The Walk Home”



God is in soft leaves  
and purple flowers so bright  
they make your eyes hurt.  
God is in green traffic lights  
and whispers of spring air.  
God is in dogs twisting  
on ends of leashes  
and cats with flicking tails.  
God is in old men on porches  
who say that it's nice to see  
you even though they're going  
blind.  
God is in proud fathers  
and stern ones.  
He is in the daisies lining  
the walk to the door.  
God is in daughters  
who make magic reality  
of their dreams.  
God is in the call  
from one stranger to another  
to share the loveliness  
of afternoon.  
God is in the wisdom of  
old men on their porches,  
and in their delight as they tell  
what they've seen.  
God is in introductions,  
handshakes,  
see-you-laters,  
and the sound of passing cars.  
He is in tandem bicycles  
and little girls in red dresses.  
God is in the rattle of the bees  
in their zigzag wonder  
as they teach us how to love  
the yellow of the flowers.

God is in locked doors.  
He is in the keys inside our book bags.  
God is in the opening up  
and the coming home.



\_\_\_\_\_

Amen.

## Time On My Hands (Dori)

My mom was very creative, extremely talented and had good taste. She sewed tents and prom dresses, made art from nature, sugar easter eggs with intricate scenes inside, decorated cakes and much more. I learned to appreciate how focused Mom could be on her craft amid piles of laundry and dishes. She would not allow housework to interrupt her flow. She knew the value of time away.

I don't mean to brag but I feel like I have plenty of time on my hands for quiet moments. I intentionally take time. The need for housework doesn't distract me, the need for yard work doesn't distract me, paperwork deadlines don't do it. While I "sharpen the axe" and ponder on all things big, work and projects pile high. Only then does it all become a distraction and all at once! It is hard to maintain a balanced life. Here is a quote worth repeating:

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." Annie Dillard

I was employed in wholesale sales and manufacturing for most of my earning life. When I showed up at 8 AM I knew exactly what to do and was creative at finding more to do when work slowed down. Being in an office with the continuous flow of words and numbers is like working on a thousand piece puzzle without any anxiety over chores gone undone. I loved my work. Keeping up with domestic life after an eight hour day wasn't so hard. You know what they say, "A body in motion stays in motion." Life was good.

Within 13 months everything changed: I lost my husband to cancer, quit my job, sold a house, moved a thousand miles, then moved again. The stress was hard on me physically so I was glad to find a daycare for Anna and some respite for me. I spent a lot of time resting, reading, praying, and doing nothing. I got better but repeatedly delayed my plans to reenter the work force and lost the satisfaction one gets after a day of helping the world turn efficiently. I discovered I was and still am totally undisciplined about managing my own, uncommitted time. Lord hear my prayer.

As it turns out, I came to Portland and accidentally retired. James says that God is the source of all the things I crave, so please God know this: What I crave is to be 100% accountable for precious time spent as I take pleasure in many simple things: smells, bells and today, an hour in the sun. Life is good.



## Chapter 11 Sleeping If I Should Die (Dori)

This I prayed: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

And then I, at a very tender age, would lie awake pondering my death. A bedtime ritual I could have done without. Maybe I've just discovered a root of all my behavior problems.

You know the premarital counsel: Never go to bed angry. I lost a lot of sleep over that one too. There is always a new anger du jour if you let it in.

Sleep spoiler: fretting about my ability to fall asleep, worrying about sleeping through an alarm and missing a deadline.

The balm of laughter that friendships create seems always worth the sacrifice of sleep. On an ordinary day that comes in the form of late night political humor: Trevor Noah, SNL, **any** comic relief. On the other hand, there is the lure of late night solitude away from housemates and phone rings and door knocks. I've been there.

And then to ruin precious shut eye, there's always John Wesley's admonition: Have I done all the good I can?

I am slow to mature; slow to recognize my mortality, slow in my willingness to end this day. I have never wanted to give up my ability to move about at will, taking it all in, being "Little Miss Independent," invincible. But regardless of what goes on in my mind, when my body says it is time for sleep there is no stopping me. If I can get prone somewhere, that's all she wrote. But to willingly give up life to sleep is to go to a dark, vulnerable, possibly deadly place.

Being sleep deprived will do the same. I have learned that, "sleep hygiene" is just as important as food and exercise. All this self-help is putting a damper on my style.

Okay, I confess my limits. Like the time I took my sore knee for a walk when it really needed rest, I am not the sole authority in my life. I will embrace sleep and relinquish my life to the Caretaker to whom I trust. The Caretaker will deal with all my regrets and provide comfort in my renewal. Some days I feel like I need an entire Board of Directors but my faith informs me that eight hours with the Caretaker is what my soul needs. All the better for being awake during the remaining sixteen.

The thought of death keeps me awake during the day now while I prepare for whatever change comes my way. I have a relatively strange appetite for shrinking my belongings, embracing simplicity and getting down to the bone of my existence, a process that is long and hard for



someone of privilege.

I've taken a poll among my friends and we all agree that, when it is time, to die before we wake is the preferable way to go.

## Epilogue

### Sacred Average Day

*How do you experience the divine presence in an average day?*

This topic has become one of my favorite things to chat about. I have found two powerful trends that seem to be developing.

**First:** Depending on your phase of life, there are certain '*givens*' that seem to be assumed and everything else becomes a '*variable*'. In the formula of life, the question seems to hinge on either how to manipulate (change) the variables or how to transform a given into a variable.

[more about this in the video]

**Second:** This seems to be one of those categories where "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer". People who can sense the divine presence in one area of life can translate that into finding the sacred in many other areas and moments of life. People who don't develop that ability in the big stuff, unfortunately, can't detect the divine in any area of life.

This is why I am so passionate practicing together when we have gathered! If Sunday is done right, it helps me see the sacred in the other six days of the week. If our activity at church is effective, it opens our eyes to see the sacred at work in the rest of the world.

*Watch the short video and let me know your thoughts. I love comparing notes on this topic.*

[youtube id="C\_jaFfJ37Cc"]