

# *“The Tyranny of the Urgent!”*

**Isaiah 55:6**

**Psalm 27: Selected Verses**

**Psalm 46: Selected Verses**

**Mark 1:14-39**

**Sermon preached by**

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This past week I came across a little story...a PARABLE, if you will...in which I found great truth. It comes from Africa and this is how it goes:

Every morning, when the sun comes up, a gazelle wakes.

He knows that he must outrun the fastest lion or he will be eaten.

When the sun comes up, the lion also wakes.

He knows he must outrun the slowest gazelle or he will starve.

In the end, it doesn't really matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle.

When the sun comes up, you better start running!

Rings true, doesn't it? At least it does in MY life. We ALL live such busy lives these days. So many demands are made upon us that we can't POSSIBLY meet them all. We run from sun up to sun down, chasing and being chased by responsibilities and expectations...needs and demands...all of which have an URGENCY about them that HAVE to be met RIGHT NOW. What little of us is left after we deal with the countless demands of our jobs is gobbled up by community activities...family activities...children's activities...church activities. Yea, when the sun comes up, we'd better start running, alright! But too often, when the sun goes down, the race is still on.

You can imagine how it was for Jesus. Almost immediately after he began his public ministry by calling disciples to follow him, he was mobbed by needy people. A little teaching, an exorcism, a healing...and SUDDENLY the crowds began to press in upon him.

Why did people flock to him? Was it because they saw him as the Son of God? Was it because they believed him to be the long awaited Messiah? Was it because they understood what he meant when he announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand? Of COURSE not! They came out of the woodwork so that he could meet their needs. Rumor had it that there was a new miracle worker on the scene who could make the blind to see...the deaf to hear...the lame to walk...and the dumb to talk. So everyone with an ailment came out to find Jesus. They crowded around him with their brokenness saying, *“Fix me! Here's my need! This is my problem! Fix me!”* There was certainly no shortage of people wanting a piece of Mr. Fix-it Jesus. As Mark so pointedly tells us in his Gospel: *“And the whole city...EVERYBODY IN TOWN...was gathered together at his door.”* And I think I have some busy days.

And so, Jesus worked. He healed people right and left. The more he healed, the more the sick were brought to him. The more he worked, the more the needs multiplied. *“He healed many people with various diseases and cast out a multitude of demons,”* the scriptures say. But it was never enough...NEVER enough. This is, after all, a hurting world and no matter HOW much Jesus did, it was never enough.

The next day, while the needy people were still sleeping, Jesus woke long before sunrise and left the town and went out to a lonely place. In other words, he went somewhere where he could be alone...AWAY from the demands of the people...the cries of need...the insistence that he DO

something. Oh, it wasn't that he was trying to get out of work, mind you. He wasn't *uncaring* about the obvious pains of the pleading people who had surrounded him. But he refused to allow them to define his life and his ministry. His purpose in life, you see, was NOT found in the demands people made on him.

Jesus left the crowds behind not simply to ESCAPE, however, but to PRAY. He went to God. Knowing he could only keep his balance...his center...his focus in life by being in constant contact with his Heavenly Father, Jesus went away to a quiet place to commune with his Lord.

Now, to be sure, Jesus never had a shortage of opportunities to "do good." The question for him, therefore, was "*WHICH good should I do?*" Naturally, he could have used the "squeaky wheel" method...you know, "*the squeaky wheel gets the grease*" idea. Take care of the problem or the need that's making the most noise at the moment. But that was NOT how Jesus lived his life.

Instead, by staying CONNECTED to God, Jesus was able to maintain a clear sense of his PURPOSE in life. He KNEW why he was in the world. He had a GRIP on his mission. He was CLEARLY FOCUSED on the task at hand. All of which allowed him to care for the needs of people and deal with the problems of life without becoming a victim to the TYRANNY OF THE URGENT. Because he knew his purpose in life, he could sometimes WALK AWAY from the demands of needy people...NOT because he was callous...NOT because he was uncaring...but because he knew that his mission was to speak God's Good News to the deepest need of humanity...the need for the loving, gracious Word of God...a loving, gracious Word which called people THEN...and calls people NOW...into full, complete, joyous relationships with God...and with God's people.

Sometimes...no, I'd say OFTENTIMES...maybe even MOST times...we allow our lives to be consumed by demands. We end up in perpetual motion...but often unfulfilled. Though we do much...though we stay busy...we accomplish little that has to do with our life's purpose. And as a result, we often court burnout. Think about it! We get burned out with our jobs. We get burned out with our social obligations. We get burned out with our civic responsibilities. And if you were truly honest, I bet you'd even have to admit that sometimes you even get burned out with your CHURCH responsibilities as well. At least I know I do! Our BUSY-NESS oftentimes simply burns us out!

But despite some common misconceptions, burnout is NOT the result of OVER commitment...NOT the result of TOO MUCH activity. It is the product of the WRONG KIND of activity. When we're doing the sorts of things that help us accomplish our life's purpose, we aren't worn down...we're BUILT UP! It ENERGIZES us! Our life has MEANING! The question therefore is NOT "*How BUSY are you?*"...or "*How FAST do you have to run?*"...or "*How many people DEPEND on you or make DEMANDS of you?*" The question instead is, "*Are you living out God's PURPOSE for your life?*"

Sometimes...again I'd say OFTENTIMES...people, even those who are very successful by the *world's* standards, discover that either they have never really answered that question...or they have lived all their lives with the wrong answer. I once heard a very well-known and powerful personality, toward the end of his life, say:

When I look back on my life nowadays...when I review what I have done and who I have been...what really hits me the hardest is that what seemed at the time to be the most significant and seductive, now seems the most futile and absurd. For instance: success, however you want to define it – being known and praised... acquiring wealth and fame...having power or having "things"...experiencing everything society tells me is supposed to make me happy – when I look back on it all, I'm really amazed at how worthless it all was. It gave my life no real meaning or purpose. What I've found really matters in life and gives our lives true purpose and joy is the giving and receiving of kindness and love. Anything other than that has little real meaning in life. (Malcolm Muggeridge)

Now, to be sure, there ARE many obligations that call to us...needs that insist on our attention. But if our lives are ever going to find real fulfillment, it will NOT be in the tyranny of the urgent. It will instead be, as Jesus knew well, in our relationship with God...in getting AWAY from our "busy-ness" in order to spend time with God...in order that we might LISTEN for what GOD

tells us is important for us to do.

Oh now, don't get me wrong here! It's not that all that OTHER stuff isn't important – our commitment to our jobs...our community responsibilities...our families...our kids...what we do here at the church – their ALL important...just as the needs that JESUS would occasionally turn away from were UNQUESTIONABLY legitimate needs as well...important concerns that needed to be met – the need for sight...the ability to walk...healing from illness...the sharing of grace and mercy and acceptance and love. They were ALL tremendously important needs that Jesus spent much of his time meeting...even as WE spend much of OUR time meeting the legitimate needs and demands that are placed on us. But Jesus knew when it was time to step away...and step TOWARD God...to TALK with God...to seek God's guidance and will...to find STRENGTH to go ON meeting those needs. Even on the night before he was to die, with all the pressure and demands and needs of the world descending down upon him, Jesus went, as the Gospel of Luke tells us, "*as usual*" to the Garden of Gethesemane to PRAY...to spend TIME ALONE with his Heavenly Father before what he knew was about to come.

This past week, during Wednesday Night at the Prez, our Middle School kids were studying about Jesus going to the Garden to pray. And during that study, they learned a new name for an old, old concept that Jesus knew well and carried out often. It's called simply TAG...T-A-G...TIME ALONE WITH GOD. And maybe...just MAYBE...that's something WE all need to learn to do as well.

That morning when Jesus went "Missing in Action," the disciples came looking for him. They found him alone...far away from the demands of the crowd. There was a touch of reproach in Peter's voice when he spoke to Jesus. "*Everyone's LOOKING for you, Jesus!*" was what he said. But his message was, "*This is your big opportunity, Jesus! Why in the WORLD are you disappearing at a time like this! These people NEED you! You got win these people over while the time is right! There's so much to be done! Let's get back at it, Big Guy!*"

No doubt, Jesus shocked his disciples...and perhaps US as well...with his answer. "*Come on! Let's go! We got to leave this place and move on to the next town so that I can share the Good News of God's love with THEM as well. For THAT is what I have come to do!*" Jesus knew EXACTLY what he was doing. The question is, can WE say the same? Do we, as followers of Jesus know what WE should be doing? Or are we simply caught up in the Tyranny of the Urgent?

I opened with a parable. Let me close with one. Listen, if you have ears to hear!

Satan called a worldwide convention of his angels. In his opening address, he said, "*We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles. We can't even keep them from their Christian values. But we CAN do something else! We can keep them from forming a deep and abiding relationship with God and with his Son. If they gain that connection, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church. Let them have their Christian values. But steal their TIME so they can't gain that intimate relationship with their Lord! This is what I want you to do, angels! Distract them from gaining hold of that connection with God and maintaining that vital relationship in their lives!*"

"*How shall we do that?*" Satan's angels shouted.

"*Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent all kinds of schemes to occupy their every waking moment. Tempt them to spend, spend, spend and then to borrow, borrow, borrow. Convince them to fill every moment of every day with some kind of activity...some of it meaningful and worthwhile, to be sure...but the rest of it frivolous and inconsequential. Over stimulate their minds so they can't hear God's still, small voice whispering in their ears. Entice them to constantly play Howard Stern or Glen Beck on their satellite radio or Barry Manilow on their CD players when they're driving in their cars...and to keep Glenn Beck or Keith Obermann spouting nonsense on their TV's every minute they're at home. And see that there is background noise everywhere...EVERYWHERE...that they turn so they can never listen to the sound of silence and hear Christ speaking to them. Addict them to surfing the Internet and constantly streaming on their Facebook pages or Tweeting on their Twitter accounts. And best of all, make sure they've got a cell phone to their ear or their fingers tapping out text messages during every waking moment of their day! Fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with 24 hour a day news channels. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues and even faces of needy children begging for their help.*"

*Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from vacation exhausted by too much activity and not enough down time. Keep them inside and don't let them ever go out to experience the grandeur of nature. Send them to amusement parks and sporting events and concerts and movies instead. And make sure to build bigger and fancier malls to keep them shopping.*

*And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk about things that really don't matter so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions. Let them argue and bicker and say nasty things about each other, even in church. Oh, let them hear the good news of God's love, but then, don't let them live it so that their lives simply become hollow shells that claim to follow Jesus, but really don't. And crowd their lives with so many good causes that they'll not have time to seek and enjoy a real relationship with Jesus. That way, they'll always be working from their OWN strength and will never know the power that God and his Christ can have in their lives!*

Well, by the time Satan was finished with his charge to his angels, they were all cheering and eager to get to work keeping Christ followers from knowing a true relationship with God. Eagerly they set out causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and to live their lives rushing from one urgent task to another.

The question, of course, is whether Satan's scheme been successful in YOUR life?

Why not make sure its NOT successful in YOUR life?

Why not REFUSE to fall victim to the TYRANNY OF THE URGENT?

Instead, why not follow Jesus' example and find as many precious moments of "TAG Time" as you can. TIME ALONE WITH GOD is often what kept Jesus going in the midst the MULTITUDE of demands life placed on him. And maybe...just maybe...it's what can keep YOU going when the Tyranny of the Urgent threatens to consume YOUR life!

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear...and let them live!

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