

December 9, 2007

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### **Detours and Distractions**

Matthew 11:13-19

I sometimes wonder what the difference is between a distraction and a “senior moment”. I seem to have plenty of both. I tend to identify a “senior moment” as a time when I cannot think of a word, or the date that something happened or the name of a place. I usually rely on Randy when I am having a “senior moment” but he seems to be having his own “senior moments” and is not much help.

When I actually forget to do something, I blame that on distractions. I realized last night that I either had a senior moment or a major distraction this week because I forgot to send my weekly epistle. I wrote it, but I did not send it.

Distractions and detours are realities in life. There are times when I think that distractions actually have a life of their own and their intent is to get us off course. It is as if a distraction singles us out and only finds success if it actually derails us from our intended path.

We are on the journey toward Bethlehem. We have a little over two weeks to get there. It seems like plenty of time, but there is so much to do before we arrive. We are committed to arriving on time, but will we be fully attentive to the journey or the destination?

We are so easily distracted. We are the generation of television, video games and internet news. We have trained our brains for short blasts of information and if at any time we become bored or disinterested, we change the station, put in a new game or surf a new internet site. Keeping our interest is no easy matter. Staying the course, keeping our eyes on the goal, remaining engaged--not the best traits in our culture focused on immediate gratification. In the midst of our impatience, we miss the opportunity to fully engage heart and soul with each other or with the Divine. American Christians have a serious case of spiritual ADD, spiritual attention deficit disorder.

Is our true path that of our daily routine and the diversion is the journey to the manger or is our true path the journey to the manger and the rest of life just distraction? I am not sure some days. I wonder like you about the meaning of life. What is real, what is illusion? I have never felt that wondering about life and faith insults God, but rather the question provides an opening for the Divine to show us the way. We are on a

journey. The question is “Where are we going?” Are we taking a direct path or are we meant to wander? I am reminded of the old adage, “Not all who wander are lost.”

Where are you headed this December? Is the busyness of the season occupying your focus, or is the birth of Christ? Is this birth the centerpiece of your life or is it the distraction, the detour? Just when I think I know the answer to that question, I find it in front of me again. The birth was certainly the most important detour in the life of the shepherds and wise men and I am quite confident whether we take a direct path or one filled with detours, the birth of Jesus Christ is also the most important journey in our lives as well.

The quote on the cover of the bulletin this morning reads: “Life is full of road bumps, detours and distractions. Road bumps are things you have to get over, detours are things you have to change to make it work, and distractions are things that try to get you to forget what is important in life. So, follow the signs, keep your eyes on the road and don’t let bumps, detours or distractions cause you to lose your way.” [Stephanie Saffle.] It leads us to believe that the detours are the mistakes of life, but not always so. Some of the most beautiful skiing I have ever enjoyed included detours off the main path. There have been detours that have taken me to wondrous places. I remember taking an alternate route in Wyoming years ago. It proved to be absolutely breathtaking. Some detours, some distractions may be exactly what we need.

So much of life is predictable and routine. So much of life is focused on our particular agenda. For me, the manger is a stop on the way to the Kingdom of God. The routine in my life welcomes the fresh in-breaking of new life in this birth. This birth gives me, gives us, hope for new life here and now and eternally.

At the heart of the message in this passage of the Gospel of Matthew is that people are so committed to their personal point of view that even when we have an opportunity to experience new life, to hear the music and dance, we refuse. We are too focused on our own agenda to waste our time dancing. We are too preoccupied by what is before us to listen to the message of Christ. We resist detours and distractions in our live experience even when our God calls us to be open to the mystery of the Spirit of God in our midst.

This week did not go the way I planned. It was filled with the unexpected. I am tempted to feel uneasy about the fact that what I planned did not happen, and yet, if it had, I would have missed the beauty, the honesty and the trust of the surprises that did happen.

Mitch Albom has written another best seller. You may remember his first book, *“Tuesdays with Morrie.”* The book to which I refer is entitled, *“For One More Day.”* It is the story of a man who wishes he had one more day with his mother. As a young boy, the main character of the story is abandoned by his father and then raised by his

mother. As he becomes an adult he is emotionally crippled; his mother dies and then when he becomes suicidal, he returns to the home where he spent his childhood and finds his mother who died eight years earlier. It is interesting to think about having one more chance with a loved one, to say the things left unsaid, to enjoy being in their presence again.

But, what catches my imagination is not that we might have one more day with a loved one who has gone before us, as wonderful as that would be, but that we would see this very day, Sunday, December 9, 2007 as our one more day with those who are here and now and most importantly with our God. The relationships in our lives are not just the detours and the distractions, but rather the main purpose of our living. We allow our work, our plans to distract us from our relationships. We take them for granted. We put off until tomorrow the love and encouragement that we could share today. We get busy with our days, our plans, and our work and too easily release the time we have with our loved ones. In our spiritual life, we become lulled into thinking there is always more time. We will place Christ at the center of our living, tomorrow. There will be time for that tomorrow. Focused on the tasks before us, focused on the "to do list" of the season, we may very well miss the relationships that define this season.

We are on the path toward the manger. If we take detours, may they be paths that lead us toward others, toward giving, toward wonder. If we step off the path, may it be toward a time to ponder the power and blessing of this birth and the new life it brings to us. If we are distracted, may it be from an agenda that leads us away from the promises of God. If we are distracted, may it be with awe for the blessings in our lives.

We have this one life and as far as any of us know, we have this one more day. May we be listening to our God in such a way that we hear the music of the season, allow our hearts to be softened by the love expressed in the season and open our minds and hearts to the wonder and mystery of the birth of Christ.

This is a time for reconnecting with friends, family and most importantly, spirit. If that is a detour in your life, so be it! Take it fully and completely. May we allow that detour to overwhelm our typical pattern of living. The Kingdom of God is here and now, and this is our day, our moment in time to live as we dream, live as we are taught by our faith, to live toward spiritual wholeness.

It is not too late to make a phone call, write a letter, or send an email, to reconnect with family and friends. Share the words that are in your heart. Ask for forgiveness and offer forgiveness, release pettiness, and express appreciation. Some detours take us to dancing. Some detours open us to express our truest self.

At the end of life, we do not want to be filled with regret. We do not want to have been so focused on a path for our living that we ignored our spiritual path. We do not want to miss the opportunities each day to be the disciple that God envisions.

It happened in the town of Billings, Montana. On a cold night in December, a young boy was doing his homework in his bedroom when his innocence was shattered. A brick flew through a window of his home breaking not only the glass of the window, but the heart of a child. The young boy is Jewish and his family has placed a menorah, a symbol of their faith, in the window. The brick: a symbol of hate.

The boy does not understand why his family is singled out and hated and he begins to experience fear. For the first time in his life he is afraid in his neighborhood, his school and his town. The incident hits the news and the community becomes aware of the situation. To his surprise, one by one the boy's neighbors put a picture of a menorah in their windows. Suddenly, in the midst of the many decorations for Christmas there are also menorahs everywhere. Yet again in the history of humanity, love overwhelms hate.

The incident with hate and the response of love was a detour for this community. They had not planned to place a menorah in their windows, they had not planned to confront the bigotry in their town and yet it was a detour of hope, a detour of blessing. It changed the season not only for this young boy, but for the whole community.

God invites us to listen to grace in our midst. The Kingdom of God is the place where we allow ourselves to get off our self-centered path and focus on our journey of faith. It may very well lead us on detours, it may very well bring us distractions and it will certainly lead us to places we never expected to go.

This is our one more day. It has everything to do with the here and now. It is not about just wishing and hoping for change in our lives and in our world, but rather bringing change to our life and to the community around us by sharing the blessings of faith in all our relationships. For me, the easiest way to find my way is to rely on the words of Jesus. They shape not only where we begin, but also where we will ultimately arrive. Please join me in praying these words of faith, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. "