

“Being Present”

(Mark 12)

There was a time in my life when the words, “orderly chaos” were more than just a contradiction in terms, but would have literally caused involuntary twitching and a cold sweat to form on my brow. In my early adulthood, “orderly chaos” was something to be avoided, something to be overcome with as many to-do lists and yellow post-its notes strategically placed until my fingers ached from writing. And then, I became a parent and orderly chaos became woven into my life. I notice this kind of orderly chaos when I am at once having a tea party with Olivia on my left and playing Star Wars action figures with Ethan on my right. I felt this kind of orderly chaos on Wednesday when I helped out at Ethan’s Penny Carnival as kids paraded in their Halloween costumes and the joyful commotion echoed off the concrete walls of the gym as the kids rotated from one game to the next all to the rhythm of the *Monster Mash*. That was being in the presence of gusto. I notice this kind of orderly chaos at the end of the day, the strange sound of silence settles in our house as stars peek out against the autumn sky, and I find myself stealing glances at the almost angelic faces of my children as they sleep. But friends such orderly chaos is not confined to the four walls of our home, for it spills into the church as well. Orderly chaos is our Wednesday morning Bible Study group talking about hymns. Orderly chaos is what would happen this morning if I brought up the subject of what color to re-carpet the sanctuary. Orderly chaos is offering to hungry runners platters of brownies after a short five mile jaunt. More and more I am convinced that what we are to do as people of faith, as disciples of Christ today, is more than simply tolerate or try to control the orderly chaos of our lives. Rather, we are to be present, be fully present to that orderly chaos for it might just be out of the cacophony and commotion of living daily life that we can encounter the sacred.

To be present is about more than just showing up with countless other tasks vying for and trying to get our attention. To be present is about being radically open to what is going on right before us, truly notice who is right in front of you, listening intently and offering that person your full, undivided presence. To be present is to be fully immersed in the moment, whether it is six year olds racing around a gym or six church friends sitting around a table. To be fully present is one of the most sacred gifts we can offer in a world where multi-tasking has become so common place that we chat on our cell phone, while up-dating our status on Facebook, while cooking dinner, while putting away the dishes, and somewhere we hear ourselves say, “I wonder why I am tired?” We need not blame only technology. Here in this space, how often does the fact we need milk from the store on the way home or we finally realize what we should have said to our co-worker’s snide comment on Friday or we **finally** remember the name of great aunt Berta’s cousin that was on the tip of our tongue last night? How often are we distracted from fully engaging in the sacred stirring and swirling and almost shouting out in this holy time together?

To be fully present, radically open to all the possibilities of this moment right here, right now is more than just Emily Post politeness, friends, it is at the very core of discipleship. Our scripture reading this morning is pulled from the unfolding of Mark’s holy week narrative. In the verses leading up to the one we heard, Jesus is first questioned by the Pharisees about paying taxes, which has always been an emotionally charged issue. After a quick witted remark about giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s and God what is God’s; then immediately some Sadducees press in and spin this yarn about a wife who marries a man who dies, who

then marries his brother, who dies, who marries his brother, who dies, and my head starts spinning just reading it; and who is the woman going to be married to in the resurrection, even though the Sadducees did not even believe in the possibility of resurrection. People keep pushing in on Jesus, orderly chaos swirls around with question after question, and the shadow of the cross creeps ever closer. Until a scribe asks about the greatest commandment; and Jesus gives this response of love. Love God and love your neighbor. As the crowd of curious by-standers lean in closer to listen, Jesus offers stealth answers that cut to the very heart of the issues, it is the *Shema*, the words of Moses from Deuteronomy about loving God with all that is in you and Jesus' coupling that with the law from Leviticus about loving your neighbor that silences the crowd. From the commotion of questions to silence as people are reminded there is but one kernel of truth to which we all cling and find our strength: love. Love God and love your neighbor.

Loving God and loving your neighbor are so intricately interwoven that when the scribe asked for one commandment, he received two instead. You cannot separate the one from the other. Loving God begins with enjoying the sunshine baptizing your face as you rake, **even** as your neighbor's leaves land squarely in your yard. Loving God begins with prayers of thanksgiving for the day as you close your eyes to sleep, **even** as your neighbor picks that exact time to start practicing his drums. Loving God begins with listening for God in the morning, even as the car cuts you off on the way to work. To merge our response to God's love with a reaction of love toward our neighbors remains such a difficult teaching and truth that I dare say ***it still has the power to silence us today*** just as it did two thousand years ago.

In the midst of the orderly chaos of questions flying at Jesus from all direction, I sense that he was fully present and radically open. In the midst of orderly chaos of our lives, we too are invited to be fully present and radically open to the sacred amid children shouting, cars honking, radios blaring, cell phones ringing, and all the other sounds that contribute to the modern day soundtrack of daily life. For friends, being present, open to this holy moment, is what is at the heart of All Saints Day. Reinhold Niebuhr once wrote, 'Every time I look to the past, I see the eyes of my ancestors gazing to the future.' Today on the one hand is about remembering. We name those whose fingerprints are forever etched upon our hearts. We feel our hearts leap and overflow with memories that get caught in tear drops rolling down our faces. And if all we were to do was read a name, then today would only be about remembering, and that would be enough. But we also light a candle, symbolizing the light each person shared with us. Every time we look to the past, we see the eyes of our ancestors gazing to the future. The candles of those whose life forever shaped our life burn brightly today and those lights can help guide us into the uncertainty of tomorrow. Every time we look to the past, we see the eyes of our ancestors gazing to the future, toward the unknown, offering their light and offering their full presence. To celebrate our saints today, to acknowledge that the lights of our ancestors invite us into the unknown and the newness of tomorrow, I want to invite you after each name is read to reply, "present". We are surrounded by the presence of such a great cloud of witnesses that is caught up in our orderly chaos of today. And with that one word, we also acknowledge that we fully present in this holy moment. So may you be fully present to the orderly chaos that unfolds this week. May you be radically open to the swirling of the Spirit as you move from one task to another. And may you know and trust that it is out of the orderly chaos, out of our full awareness and alertness to the present moment that we often stumble into the grace of God and into ways of offering our heartfelt love to our neighbor.

And let all God's people with gusto say, "Amen!"

Friends, let us be present now as we sing ourselves into this time of naming and celebrating and acknowledging the presence of our saints.