

“24/7/365”

Amos 4:4-13; 5:21-24/Matthew 23:23-28
FPC/February 28, 2010/2nd Sunday of Lent
By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. Introduction

“24/7/365”.....the term has come to mean too busy, too much to do, gone too much.....always plugged in, always on line, always working.....no down time, no time to relax, no time to play. “24/7/365”.....folk singer Harry Chapin was on to that over 30 years ago with this song “Cat’s in the Cradle.” **(Play “Cat’s in the Cradle,” lyrics as insert, and in Appendix)**

Harry Chapin’s song about a “24/7/365” father passing that way of life onto his son is still played on the radio, and appears every once in a while in television shows, movies and commercials. Though written in 1974, it still speaks truth. And in a way it’s a prophetic voice, as “24/7/365” is more a way of life now than it was 30 years ago.

Like many people, I have lived into “Cat’s in the Cradle” in some ways. My dad was busy, and gone a lot with work. He was successful, but missed a number of family activities regularly. In fact, about six years ago we were talking. Retired, he and my mom sold their home and were moving to Arizona. We went out to help them pack up. And in one candid moment of reflection my dad said, “I’m sorry now that I worked as much as I did. I missed a lot of you and your brothers growing up. And now when I have the time, you’re all gone, and spread across the country.”

I tried to learn from my dad and be more involved in the lives of my kids when they were growing up. I think I did some things better. But they’d probably still say I worked too much.

“24/7/365”.....the season of Lent invites us to take the time and reflect on our way of life, our faith, and who and what we love.

II. Text and Exegesis

“24/7/365”.....as I listened to the texts from Amos this morning, I heard them as an invitation to reflect on our busyness and our experiences in life, and our busyness and our worship life.

A. **Read Amos 4:6-13.** In this text the prophet announces their failure to stop and reflect on their experiences in life. Because they lived “24/7/365” lives.....because their calendars were full, and their cell phones were ringing, and the list of unanswered

email was growing.....they never stop to wonder about the meaning of events in their lives. They just rushed on from one thing to the next.....and never stopped to ask why they were rushing, and what it all meant.

Particularly they had drifted away from God, and drifted away from living together as God's people. There had been a famine, but it had never stopped them long enough to wonder about the way of their lives. Likewise there had been a drought, the destruction of crops due to disease and locusts, a war, and a natural disaster.....but they had never taken the time to examine the way of their lives, the way of their faith, or the way the things and people they loved. And so they continued to drift away from God, and away from living together as the people of God.

A few days after the earthquake in Haiti televangelist Pat Robertson was feeling prophetic, so he boldly proclaimed that the earthquake in Haiti was a result of God's judgment on the past and present practice of voodoo in Haiti. Perhaps you remember that. Such a pronouncement is not prophetic. Rather it is idiotic, and filled with self-righteousness and pride. Rightly, his words were judged as foolish, and certainly not the prophetic word of God. This is not what Amos is suggesting in examining our lives.

And in the deeper theology of Amos there is not the suggestion that God causes tragedy in our lives as punishment for some choice we have made. There are natural consequences to a way of life. If I smoke, I should not be surprised that my risk for cancer, stroke and heart attacks goes up. If I don't invest in friendship, I should not be surprised that I am lonely. There are consequences to our choices. It's the way of life.

And life is also filled with tragedies that are arbitrary. Life is chaotic. Things happen sometimes without a reason or cause. A car wreck, a disease, or a divorce.....they are not the work of God to punish us or get our attention. Rather the tragedies in life interrupt the "24/7/365" pace of our lives, giving us opportunity to reflect and examine where we're going, what we believe, and who we love. The sadness and failure of my first marriage was not God's punishment for anything. But I did use it to as an opportunity to reflect on life and learn. And certainly I'm not perfect in my second marriage, but I think I'm better. I hear this text in Amos inviting us to step off the "24/7/365 train" and examine our lives. Not that we might be perfect.....but maybe that we might live better.

B. The second group of passages in Amos this morning speaks to busy lives and worship. **Read Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-24.**

In some of the best known passages from Amos, the prophet announces God's complete rejection of their worship life. Prayers, songs, sacrifices, offerings, festivals, regular worship services...all and everything they did.....it's all rejected. Why?

I think the prophet announces God's rejection of their worship life for two reasons. The first is that in their "24/7/365" lives worship was more about them than it was about God. Their places of worship were big and beautiful, they were filled with activities and programs.....but their attitude was "check it off and get it done... ..squeeze it in and move on to the next thing." It was about being noticed and being seen. It was about giving so to have your name on a list.....offering the best sacrifice so to get others approval. It was religion without faith.....seeking the holy place, but not the Holy One.

The second reason their worship life was categorically rejected was because of their way of life the other six days. There was no integrity in their lives. They were busy with religion, and then corrupt the courts. They would offer a sacrifice, and then take the land of a poor farmer. They would offer prayers, and then abuse a poor servant in their home. They would sing in worship, and then ignore the needs of the poor children and widows in the streets. There was a disconnect between the life they professed and the life they lived.

God called the people of God to live differently. They were to love God, and love their neighbors. Justice was to be more than a theory, but an everyday practice in each of their lives. And righteousness was not to some amorphous moral position, but faithfulness to the Ten Commandments lived out in their life together. Justice and faithfulness weren't someone else's job.....they were everyone's job, one person, one choice, one relationship at a time. Busy religion was not a substitute for justice and righteousness in their life together. It still isn't.

Now that doesn't mean the church is to be a community of perfect people. May God save us from pretending such foolishness. But we are to be a people who live together differently than the world around us. We are to be a community of forgiveness, grace and mercy. That's why Jesus' gets so angry with the scribes and Pharisees in the reading from Matthew 23. The leaders and teachers made the minor things the important things. And the important things were forgotten. We are to be a community that connects faith and life, belief and choice, Sunday and Monday. The way of Jesus is to become more and more our way. And I believe it takes stepping away from the "24/7/365" lifestyle to make that happen. New ways of life require "air, space and time to take root."

III. Some Reflections

“24/7/365”it’s a way of life increasing lived with some costs. And I think we are becoming more aware of that. Harry Chapin’s song “Cat’s in the Cradle” is still heard, because we are concerned about the way of life and danger he sings about. I don’t have any big answers to “24/7/365,” as I struggle with that myself. But I do think answers come to us with honest reflection and conversations about life, faith, God and the things and people we love. Perhaps that’s a good thing to ponder during Lent.

Part of the devotional life Jeanne and I share together is to read a poem at the end of the day. We were in Robert Frost for quite a while. We then tried Wendell Berry. Currently we’re reading through a collection of poems over from Writer’s Almanac, hosted by Garrison Keillor. We read a new poem each night. Not all the poems are great, but it’s a good practice for us.

However there is one poem that lays on my nightstand. It’s been there for a few months now. We have read it, and then come back to it again. And I see it every evening, and remember it. I have found some value in remembering this poem regularly. It is entitled “Ordinary Life, “ by Barbara Crooker:

“This was a day when nothing happened,
The children went off to school
Without a murmur, remembering
Their books, lunches, gloves.
All morning, the baby and I built block stacks
In the squares of the light on the floor.
And lunch blended into naptime,
I cleaned the cupboards,
One of those jobs that never gets done,
Then sat in a circle of sunlight
And drank ginger tea,
Watched the birds at the feeder
Jostle over lunches little scraps.
A pheasant strutted from the hedgerow,
Preened and flashed his jewel head.
Now a chicken roasts in the pan,
And the children return,
The murmur of stories dapple the air.
I peel carrots and potatoes without paring my thumb.
We listen together for your wheels on the drive.
Grace before bread.

And at the table, actual conversation,
No bickering or pokes.
And then, the drift into homework.

The baby goes to his cars, drives them
Along the sofa's ridges and hills.
Leaning by the counter, we steal a long slow kiss,
Tasting of coffee and cream.
The chicken's diminished to skin and skeleton,
The moon to a comma, a sliver of white,
But this has been a day of grace
In the dead of winter,
The hard, cold knuckle of the year,
A day that unwrapped itself
Like an unexpected gift,
And the stars turn on,
Order themselves
Into the winter night."

I am coming to understand that some of the "24/7/365" life style is about chasing the wind.....looking for something that can't be found. And that there is faithfulness and wisdom is finding contentment with what we do, where we are, and who we love in a very ordinary life.

IV. Appendix

"Cat's in the Cradle" By Harry Chapin

My child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you dad
You know I'm gonna be like you"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
"When you comin' home dad?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then
You know we'll have a good time then"

My son turned ten just the other day
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play
Can you teach me to throw", I said "Not today
I got a lot to do", he said, "That's ok"
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed
And said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah
You know I'm gonna be like him"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
"When you comin' home dad?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then
You know we'll have a good time then"

Well, he came home from college just the other day
So much like a man I just had to say
"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head and said with a smile
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys
See you later, can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
"When you comin' home son?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then dad
You know we'll have a good time then"

I've long since retired, my son's moved away
I called him up just the other day
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind"
He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time
You see my new job's a hassle and kids have the flu
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad
It's been sure nice talking to you"

And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me
He'd grown up just like me
My boy was just like me

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
"When you comin' home son?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then dad
You know we'll have a good time then"