

Keep Looking (*Stop, Look, and Listen*) ~ November 20, 2008
Isaiah 64:1-9; I Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37, Psalm 80

I started school when I was 4 years old. I lived in a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, named Wauwatosa. The name “Wauwatosa,” or “wah-wah-tay-see” in Menominee tribal language, means “little firefly.” I only tell you this because some of you have said you like the name “Wauwatosa.” It is obvious that those of you who like it so well did not have to spell it as young children.

Anyway, I did, indeed, walk to school through my years in Wauwatosa through rain, snow, sleet and hail and sometimes dark of night. And, yes, school was at least one mile away from my home from my elementary through high school years. In the early years I walked because my mother didn’t have a car and if she had she would never have thought of driving me such a short distance.

As a morning kindergartner, I remember my teacher, Mrs. Dean, telling us, whenever we came to the corner of a street we had to cross, to “Stop, Look and Listen.” This was to ensure that we would not dash off after school and thoughtlessly run in front of one of the relatively few cars that were around.

While I certainly did not know it then, those three little words, “Stop, Look and Listen,” would be words of wisdom for all my life. They were a call to live life with mindfulness, to live in the moment and to see what it was that was around me instead of plunging thoughtlessly ahead. As I have studied world religions, I have discovered that these words of instruction are words that belong to a contemplative life style, one found in Buddhism as well as in Christianity.

Our scripture readings for this morning, and for almost all Sunday mornings, remind us that successful lives are lived if we do not rush about willy nilly, but manage to pause, as often as we are able, to look around ourselves and discover just what it is that is going on. If we do this we can address life intelligently and respond to it in a reasonable manner. When we give ourselves time to meditate or pray we allow ourselves space in which to order things and to deal with what matters most first and to let some things in life go, trusting them into the hands of God.

Those people mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Gospel of Mark would “stop, look and listen” for God or Jesus to come to them from the sky. They longed for such a dramatic appearance. They lived in the three tiered world of their day and age. Earth was the middle layer, the sky was the upper and the underworld was the lower. It was simple to know that God dwelt above the sky in heaven. In our far more complex world, in which space exploration takes place on a daily basis, we have learned that God is not up there on a golden throne watching us from a distance. We have also learned that while the earth grows warmer as we approach its core, there is not a land of hell that exists underneath us. This makes things far more difficult for us when we look for God than it was for those who practiced religion years ago.

Perhaps, this is a good thing. Perhaps, this makes God more present for us. Perhaps, when we look “somewhere out there,” we are looking in the wrong place for our God.

There is a communion song I like a lot that tells us this. It was written by a man name Buryl Red and by a woman named Ragan Courtney. The name of this song is “In Remembrance.” The words are these:

*In remembrance of Me eat this bread
In remembrance of Me drink this wine
In remembrance of Me pray for the time
When God's own will is done*

*In remembrance of me heal the sick
In remembrance of me feed the poor
In remembrance of me open the door
And let your brother in, let him in*

*Take eat and be comforted
Drink and remember too
That this is my body and precious blood
Shed for you, shed for you*

*In remembrance of me, seek for truth,
In remembrance of me always love
In remembrance of me don't look above
But in your heart, in your heart
Look in your heart for God*

Do this in remembrance of Me

This song reminds us of the immediacy of God. It reminds us to “stop, look and listen” right where we are and to work to bring about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of kindness and patience and love right in our midst. It is not something far removed from us. It is here and now that we must decide to take action.

This Sunday we enter the time on our church calendar known as Advent. It is the time when we prepare for the coming of the Christ child once again. It is the time when we need to make ready a place within our hearts that he may enter in and renew us and remind us of what is needed to live lives in accordance with the religion we claim we embrace.

This is the Sunday of Hope or Prophecy. It tells us that something good and positive is coming to us. It is up to us to open the doors and let this wonderful gift in. And, not only are we to let this gift in, we are to share it through our thoughts, words and deeds with our brothers and sisters in the world. In this way, the presence of God comes and dwells within us and among us. We need to “stop, look and listen” for signs of all that can be ours.

-- Amen