

Psalm 8
John 14:1-8
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Irene Pak Lee
November 6, 2022

“Present to the Moment”

Well friends, I'm back! I'd like to begin this word with my thanks to you all the congregation, the Session, staff, Deacons, choir, and everyone who stepped up during my time away on this 3-month sabbatical to continue the life and ministry of Stone Church. I had no doubts. I am particularly grateful for the Rev. Evie Macway for leading and stepping in full time and using her gifts of ministry with and for you all. Can we just take a second and acknowledge her too? Thank you. I knew it would all be okay, which allowed me the gift to fully disconnect. I didn't even check my work email while I was away (okay, maybe I checked it once...or twice)... but everyone was really great about respecting my time away to refresh and renew and restore my soul and Evie, we are so grateful you'll be continuing with us in this interim period.

So the question everyone has been asking me since I've returned is: "How was it? How was your sabbatical? Was it restorative? Are you happy to be back? Are you sad to be back? What was it like?"

I want to begin answering that question with the fact and reminder that it's been a weird year, you all. For those who may not know, our installed senior pastor/head of staff left suddenly and without a really saying goodbye in February. I was put into a transitional solo pastor role right as Lent began and again we found ourselves going through a time of pastoral transition, but this time with no warning. I applaud our collective resilience and mutual support of one another as we got Evie in here as the interim and began yet another search process. But as my sabbatical began and I celebrated 10 years of ministry here with you all, I realized that I had had no real time to pause and reflect on all that has happened. It's been a process of unraveling and seeking understanding as perhaps it has been for some of you as well. So I just want to take a moment to say, if you're over it and moving on with all that's happened this year, great. And if you are still unraveling and seeking understanding and want some pastoral support, please reach out to myself or to Evie. That's why we are here.

And so sabbatical began with time. I suddenly had time. Time to read, time to be, time to think, and... time to feel my feelings. Time to feel my feelings. Now this might sound like a good thing, but at first, it was really uncomfortable. You see, I don't think I realized how much I was avoiding all of that, especially avoiding my own feelings and the reality of the impact of all that has happened not only this past year but even with life in a pandemic. Also, working full-time with two young children,

you all know or can guess that your own self is not usually a priority as a parent. I kept going, kept looking ahead, kept dealing with the next thing and filling my life with real busy-ness that comes with two young children and work and abrupt transitions. And so what do you do when you suddenly have chunks of free time (at least while the kids are in school and daycare?) What do you do when you're used to being someone who is usually going going going and looks and thinks ahead to what is next or what needs to be done and suddenly you're given the gift of time?

The disciples in our gospel reading were also given the gift of time. In their case, it was a little different. Unlike me with a known 3-month slot of time, they did not know that their time was dwindling and limited with their friend and teacher, Jesus. They, like all of us hope with those we love, thought they had a lot of time left with him. They had heard his teachings, seen his miracles and walked with him in his ministry to the oppressed, the poor, the widow. They were excited about this savior—the one they believed would be the one to save them from the empire and were waiting for him to hulk out and defeat their enemies and make all things right. They were looking to the future with hope.

And so when Jesus started talking about preparing a place ahead of them and going away and that they would know the way to where he was headed, I think they were in denial. At least Thomas in our gospel reading clarifies and asks “Wait, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

And Jesus answers: I am... I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life...if you know me, you know God. If you know me, you will know... oh, and by the way, you DO know God and have seen God.

And then in verse 8, after all of that, Philip says to him, “Lord, show us, and we will be satisfied.” If there was space for sarcasm in scripture, I feel like the writer inserted it here.

Because it's like, Philip, did you just hear the words coming out of Jesus' mouth? He's right there! He's not only showing you, he's right in front of you! Will you be satisfied?

What's that song by the Rolling Stones? “I can't get no-satisfaction...” that's what came to my mind when I read this.

Friends, Jesus was literally standing in that present moment showing him AND telling him all the ways in which Jesus himself was the heart of God, and Philip was too in his head, thinking toward the future, and not present to the moment to be satisfied by that. He thought he would be satisfied if he could know more or see

more things. If only... if only God would do this one more thing, then I'll be satisfied and believe. How many times have we also said that to ourselves? God, if you show me this then I will believe or do that. Show me and I'll be satisfied.

I want to judge him, but I am like Philip much more than I care to admit to you all. Reading this and wanting to take him by the shoulders and say "Philip, why can't you see what's in front of you!" it made me wonder...as I return from sabbatical, in what ways will I go back to assuming that I will be satisfied in something else, in a different situation or a different time or different people or even a different car? How will thinking to what I still need to do keep me from being present to the moment? To what is already right in front of me?

Because you see, if I had to share what happened during my sabbatical with the gift of time I was given, if I had to summarize it for you all, it's that I **was** able to be present to the moment. And at first, it felt like I was wasting time because I wasn't planning ahead to what I could and should be doing and accomplishing. And as I mentioned before, being present to the moment at times felt painful because I started feeling my feelings about all that has happened this past year and over the pandemic that I had been avoiding. It is not easy to be present to the moment, but one hundred percent, that was the biggest gift I was given during this time away.

You see, the "satisfaction" piece that Philip is seeking, I got to experience **not** because I got everything I wanted or was seeking out, but because I also began accepting the parts of life that I cannot change. Accepting the situations and people that I cannot change. Because I was forced to stop and disconnect from the things that required future attention, I was able to be present to what was right in front of me. And I think for all of us, avoiding the present reality of our lives is what keeps us from deep satisfaction and like Philip, from seeing the heart of God right in front of us.

Now I hope it goes without saying that I do not mean that we should be satisfied and chill with abusive or harmful situations that we are in. I am not saying that we should be satisfied with injustice or wrong that manifests in front of us or in our lives. What I mean is that there is goodness right in front of you, we don't have to keep chasing after things in hopes of satisfaction to come at a later time ... we just need to pause and be present and we might just be surprised at the gift we are given in that moment.

Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber writes, *"How in the world can I actually experience anything I have now as being good if I live in the resentment or, even worse, the nostalgia of the past or if I live in the escapist hope or fear of the future...we may be*

missing out on the sacrament of the present moment, which is exactly where God is to be found."

I love that. The sacrament of the present moment.

Friends, if I can share with you a bit of what I was gifted in the sacrament of the present moment during my sabbatical they were things like:

Watching my 2-year-old chase bubbles and noticing that she distinguishes between the big ones and the small ones and the ones she calls "snowman!" because they're connected. She's been doing this for a while-but I just started noticing it.

Watching my son take a stick and play with it for days and weeks clearly using his imagination to transform it into different characters and worlds...and just watching him.

Imprinting into my visual core memory Ezra's first day of school and walking away from me bravely as he went to class.

Driving past a fully harvested field and noticing the dirt and the beautiful patterns in it so much so that I pulled the car over to take a photo of it. I noticed dirt, you all!

Shedding tears while standing in awe in front of the sculpture Pieta by Michaelangelo in Florence.

Really tasting my food and savoring it, because true confessions you all, there are times when I'm eating my dinner over the sink as I rush to the next thing... so I got to savor food whether it was a plate of pasta in Rome or kimchi, spam and rice at home.

Holding hands with my spouse while walking in the rain in Italy.

Praying in the Sistine Chapel.

These things don't sound like amazing accomplishments or anything to write a book about, but boy was I grateful to be gifted the sacrament of the present moment. And so friends, as you get ready to go about the rest of your day and into another busy week where you're already planning and thinking ahead, I challenge you to try and even for a few moments to be present to what is before you. Because God is to be found right in front of you in the reality of the present moment. Sometimes that may mean feeling feelings that are still uncomfortable, but there is still beauty there. If you can see it and receive it, you will be satisfied. May it be so.

Amen.

