

After three years of prayer, planning, and preparation, the LC-MS National Youth Gathering came and went this past week in downtown Minneapolis. 23,000 young people of our Church body along with their adult leaders converged upon the US Bank Stadium and the Minneapolis Convention Center for five days and four nights of an outstanding faith-building experience! Wearing our purple back packs we were given the nick-name the “Lavender Christians” by some of the locals as we streamed through the streets of downtown Minneapolis!

Under the theme “Real. Present. God.” we came together from all over the country, and even from other parts of the world for worship, Bible studies, break-out educational sessions, service projects both on-site and off-site, singing, dancing, enjoying fun activities like Big Trike Racing or getting stuffed inside a big inflatable ball and being rolled along, and *so* much more! Each night when we got back to the hotel we had devotions in our family groups to talk about all that we learned and experienced that day. In summary, it was an extremely faith-enriching and spiritually- uplifting experience! After service today (earlier this morning) the 24 youth and 6 adults who went from our church will be sharing (shared) with you some of the details of their exciting, fun-filled, adventure. Suffice it to say for now, that it was both a good experience and a very *busy* one.

In fact, in a way it was almost *too* busy. What I mean is that there was just *so* much to see and do, between the mass events in US Bank Stadium and the sessions and activities in the convention center, plus all the walking in-between those places and our hotel, there was no way a person could possibly see and do everything that was offered. At the Gathering, everybody was kept *so* busy that there was hardly any time for rest. But I suppose that’s how it is for all of our lives, every day.

We are *all* busy people. Running here and there. Always on the go at break-neck speeds. Campouts and cookouts. Shuttling the kids in Mom’s Taxi to baseball, football, volleyball, basketball, and music practice. Work demands more and more of our time and energy. Deadlines to meet, quotas to fill, paperwork to get done, crops to tend to. The list of household chores seems to grow longer every week. There’s barely any time for a family *meal*, let alone an evening *devotion*. It’s little wonder that our sicknesses are mostly stress related. We are busy people moving way too fast!

Congregations can be busy places too. There is always work to do: programs to run; property to care for; bills to pay. Sometimes the work piles

up so much that it even over-shadows worship. That must never be the case, especially for us who work for the church. Worship **always** comes first in the Christian congregation. It's why God gathers a congregation in the first place, so that we can sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His Word. Any work that takes the place of worship, no matter how honorable or important it might otherwise be, is idolatry. When we're **so** busy we can't pause to hear God's Word, we can hardly turn around and ask God to bless whatever it is we're so busy doing.

The saying goes that idle hands are the devil's workshop. That may be true, but **busy** hands can also be the devil's **delight** when they keep us from the Word of God. The problem is that you don't **look** all that busy when you're listening to God's Word. What do you do when you come to church? For the most part, you sit and listen. You sing. You pray. You come forward and eat a little wafer of bread and drink a sip of wine. But for the most part, you sit and listen to God's Word. While at church you contribute nothing to the gross national product, do nothing to lower the national debt, **or** your own. You don't even solve world hunger or homelessness. By American standards, worship is unproductive.

Maybe that's why many people mistake worship for a leisurely activity, something you do only if you have the time and don't have other plans. Now, I recognize that a few of us just **can't** be here every Sunday morning because of jobs. Some jobs absolutely **have** to be done by somebody during this time to keep society running smoothly. Also, there are a very few of our members who are too frail or sick ever to leave their homes. That's why Pastor Adelsen and I bring holy communion to those who are home bound. But for most of us, these are **choices** we make, whether or not to worship with our fellow Christians on a Sunday morning, not burdens laid upon us. We **choose** to work or play or worship. We **choose** how we spend our time.

In the Third Commandment, the Lord lets us know how **He** wants us to choose how to spend our time, "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy." The explanation to that commandment tells us what that means, namely, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, gladly hear and learn it."

In this morning's Gospel, Martha was the busy one, frantically running around the house, sweeping the floors, fluffing the pillows, setting the table, stirring the pots, baking the bread. All of it important work, without a doubt. After all, this was **Jesus** coming to her house. Who wouldn't put out a special effort? Meanwhile, her sister Mary sat on the floor at Jesus' feet, just quietly taking in His word.

Then the pots on the stove start boiling over. The bread is burning in the oven. A pottery bowl crashes to the floor. The cat hops up on the table and starts eating the floral arrangement. And Martha comes storming through the kitchen door with fire in her eyes and steam coming out of her ears. “Lord, don’t care that my sister has left me to serve by myself?” “Here I am working my fingers to the bone, while You and my lazy sister are lounging on the couch.” She’s angry, not only with Mary but with Jesus and she wants Him to lay down the law, “Tell her to help me.”

Anxiety, irritation, anger, rage, bitterness, resentment, that’s the fruit we pick when we become so busy we forget Whom it is we are serving with our work and why. We lose our focus when Christ is not at the center of our work. Our hearts become frustrated and angry when they’re unbuckled from Jesus and His Word. We become angry with our brother or sisters who aren’t “pulling their weight.” We resent being part of the 20% who do 80% of the work and we’re quick to point it out to anyone who will hear. We become angry even with God for leaving us all alone and not doing something about it.

In her busyness, Martha completely loses sight of **why** she was working so hard. She was supposed to be serving **Jesus**. What a joy that should have been. But all she could see was the work that needed to be done and that she was the only one doing it. Her busyness robbed her of the joy of Jesus’ company and it robbed her of peace with her sister.

In frustration Martha resorts to the Law. “Tell her to help me.” We do the same thing. “Don’t just sit there, **do** something.” We enlist God on our side to order the slackers around. We dig up a proof text or two from the Bible to bully the complacent into action. Jesus could have done that. He could have scowled a bit, cut the theological conversation short, and sent Mary off to help her sister in the kitchen. He could have said, “The Word can wait, go help your sister with her work.”

But Jesus didn’t do that. Instead He speaks a word to busy Martha. “Martha, Martha. Look at you. You are anxious and worried about many things. And for what? I didn’t come to your house to **be** served. I came to serve **you**, to be with you and your sister. You’ve been so busy we’ve barely had time to visit. Why don’t you pull up a seat next to Mary and rest for a while. Your sister has chosen the good portion, the one thing she (and you) need the most, and I’m not about to take that from her.”

You see, Martha worshipped Jesus in the way of the **law**, offering Him **her works**, her busyness. Mary worshipped Jesus in the way of **faith** and the **Gospel**. She offered Him nothing but her presence. She sat quietly at His feet

and received His Word and Jesus simply delighted to have her sit there. He won't say or do anything to chase her away.

At the National Youth Gathering last week, our theme was "Real. Present. God" based on Psalm 46. There we hear some powerful words about the hectic and even violent state of the world: "Nations are in turmoil, kingdoms rage. The earth melts." If this Psalm were written today instead of 3000 years ago, the Psalmist might say, "The house is a mess. Work is piled high on the desk. Voice mails, e-mails, and text messages runneth over. The kids are late for practice. The dog's gotten loose. The grass needs to be mowed. Weeds have taken over the garden." "There's work to do. Don't just sit there, do something!" But the Lord says, "**Be still** and know that I am God." "Be still. Be quiet. Stop doing whatever it is you're doing, and let **Me** be God."

To sit at the feet of Jesus is what you need. It's the good portion that Jesus hung on a cross to win for you, and He won't let anyone take that away from you. Work, school, business, recreation, hobbies, sports - everything else can wait. First we must sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word. The most important activity of a follower of Jesus is really a **non**-activity- to hear the Word of God, to receive the forgiveness for our sins, and to eat and drink your Savior's Body and Blood. There is nothing more important, more central, for your life than that.

"Come to me," Jesus says, "and I will give you rest." Rest. Sabbath. That was to be the day you rested from your work to rest in God's Word. The Sabbath was God's weekly reminder that salvation is not by works but by **faith**, not by being busy but trusting in God's promise of mercy. Your busyness won't impress God. No matter how much running around you do, it will never be enough. Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve, to give His life as a sacrifice for sinners. He doesn't need our service. We need **His** Divine Service. Think of all the amazingly gracious things Jesus does for you in church every Sunday morning. At the beginning of the service, He forgives your sins. He turns the key that opens wide the gates of heaven to all who repent of their sin and trust His word of forgiveness. He preaches His Word to you. He frees you with His own body and blood.

This is where the feet of Jesus are for you to sit at, those feet that walked dusty roads to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom. Feet on which John the Baptizer was unfit to tie a sandal. Feet that were pierced by nail for our salvation. Here you get to be like Mary, sitting at His feet, resting in His Word.

Are you busy? Anxious? Stressed out? Don't just do something, sit there ... at the feet of Jesus. Amen.