

The Whispering Word

Pamela Paul wrote a new book entitled "100 Things We Lost To The Internet."

I was listening to her interview on the radio the other morning and of course what she said rang true.

The constant stream of information, entertainment and just plain background noise is changing us in ways we may not be aware of.

Even taking a walk or running for our health, which used to provide long stretches of quiet time, are now almost always accompanied with ear buds, podcasts and music.

The simple ability to be bored, to be still, to simply be, seems to be slipping away.

So here we are on Christmas morning!

And guaranteed there's a ton of smart phones and notebooks and TV's and blue tooth speakers and all kinds of other gadgets just waiting to be opened.

And googled with.

And gazed at!

We truly live in a world of instant information, constant stimulation and never ending entertainment.

For most of us these days, the last thing we see at night isn't the face of our loved one, but the screen of an iPhone.

And the first thing we see in the morning is not the stars still lingering before dawn, but the morning news show.

Or the latest email.

Or text message.

A few years ago, a university did a study about all this gadgetry.

And the effect that it's having on us.

They wanted to look closely at what this modern life is shaping we modern people into.

And so the geniuses at this University concocted an experiment which gives the participants, hundreds of men and women, electric shocks!

Now the researchers weren't trying to be Nazis, so these were relatively mild shocks.

But still strong enough and unpleasant enough that every single participant agreed that they would pay money NOT to get shocked again.

That is, until each person was asked to sit alone in a room for awhile.

With only their thoughts as company.

No electronics or other media to be a distraction.

The only thing there, aside from themselves, was a button to push if they wanted to feel a shock.

And wouldn't you know, within 15 minutes, 2/3 of the men and 1/4 of the women reached for that button, and shocked themselves?

Which led the investigators to conclude that our addiction to stimulation is creating an inability to simply be still with our own thoughts.

That that addiction is changing who we are, and how we live, as human beings.

For those of us who claim Jesus as our Lord, this is a particularly serious problem.

Because ours is not a God who shouts.

And if I can't be still with myself, how can I hear the Word who whispers?

If I can't be still with myself, will I miss the young couple, that woman who is heavy with child, who's desperately seeking a place for the night?

A safe place to bring her new born into the world.

Those who cannot be still become like the innkeeper who asks,

"Do you know what it's like to run an Inn?

It's like being lost in a forest of a million trees!

Each tree is a thing that has to be done!

Fresh sheets.

Clean towels.

Constantly wondering if the children are dressed warmly enough!

Is there enough money in the bank today?

Will there be enough money tomorrow?

A million trees!

A million things!

Until finally we have eyes for nothing else.

And all that we see, and all whom we meet, are reduced to mere things." Beuchner, *Secrets in the Dark*, 10, paraphrased.

If I can't be still, perhaps I'll miss that strange new prophet who talks about mustard seeds and salt.

Who says the most important people on earth aren't the high flyers, but the children, the hungry, the merciful.

If I can't be still, then I'll drive right by that mountaintop where thousands are listening to him.

And at the end of the day, they're famished.

Yet, amazingly, they eat until they can eat no more, when a couple of loaves of taro bread and two Ahi are blessed, and shared.

If I can't be still, I may not look up from the latest text message in time to see that fellow Lazarus, the guy who died days ago, come stumbling out of his tomb.

Still wearing the same suit we buried him in.

But, lo and behold, he's alive!

Perhaps we're so afraid to be still because we're so afraid of the world.

With its wars and rumors of wars.

With political division.

With gender and race calamities.

With the uncertainties of age and health and perhaps especially, love.

But the Word who whispers is also the Word who is Light.

And if we can bring ourselves to be still and listen, we might find that in our stillness, we are given a gift to meet the darkness of our times.

"We may find that we're given a gift to proclaim a profound truth.

Courageously and defiantly against the darkness of our time.

Against the darkness in our own hearts.

Against the darkness in our conversations with one another.

Against the darkness that darkens so many sickbeds and the beds of the dying.

And against the increasing darkness of our relationships across the political divide.

With this gift we may proclaim, in the face of all darkness, that the light of the Word who whispers – still shines!” K. Barth, Sermons, 74-75. paraphrased.

Because the Word who whispers is also the Word who is Life.

We can stand against the looming darkness because the Word who whispers frees us from our central conflict.

Our central conflict isn't between body and soul.

It's not between sex and chastity.

Nor is our central conflict between religion and every day life.

No.

Our central conflict “is between freedom and slavery.” Barth, Dogmatics, II,4.

“God doesn't become flesh to create a religion that condemns sexuality or rejects the physical world.

God becomes flesh to free us from our attachments to everything that isn't alive.

God becomes flesh to liberate us from our endless love affairs with the things that stink of death: money, power and fame.

The very forces that devour our life." Blue, From Stone to Living Word, 112, paraphrased.

And to accomplish that, the Word who whispers becomes the Word made flesh.

And therefore we don't hand our lives over to mere theories or dogmas or creeds.

We hand our lives over to the joy and depth and hope and discovery and ambiguity and yes, even the deep pain and wonder, of relationship.

Because the Word who whispers, the Word made flesh, not only loves you, the Word likes you too!

The Word who whispers not only welcomes YOUR pursuit, but the Word is in hot pursuit of you too!

But to really let this truth sink in, we need to develop the ability to be still.

As the wonderful mystic, Meister Eckhart says:

"Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness."

Yet, we don't need to run away to the monastery or up to the mountain top to find such stillness.

According to the Master:

"Some people say their peace of mind depends on being all alone.

Others say they are better off in church.

But you can do well wherever you are.

Just as you can fail wherever you are.

At the end of the day, our surroundings really don't matter.

God is with us everywhere.

In the church, yes.

And the mountain top.

But in the marketplace, too.

Here's the thing.

If you look for nothing but God, nothing can bother you.

God doesn't get distracted by the hustle and bustle of life."
Modified.

Nor need we.

If only we will let go.

And let all things be.

On this holy morning, may we ponder and worship.

May we listen, with serenity and joy, to the gentle stirrings of the
Word who Whispers.

+amen