

Margins 2 – Relationships Require Margin
September 15, 2013
Luke 10:38-42

The main purpose of this sermon series is to create space, or margin, in our lives so that we can learn to really live life to its fullest. We miss out on so much of what life has to offer because we simply do not have the time to be able to enjoy it. Last week, we talked about how we miss out on one of the truly special gifts that God gives to us by not having margin in our life, and that is REST! God created rest, modeled rest, gave rest to us as a gift, and made it one of the core laws for living our life to the fullest. We talked about how, in rest, we find heaven on earth.

Today, I want us to look at another important lost element in our world and that is relationships. I mean this in a general sense, encompassing all relationships in our lives – relationships with our parents and children, spouses, friends, family, coworkers, church members, neighbors, and any other relationships we have. I had the importance of this message hammered home to me early Thursday morning. I was awakened by Heather grabbing me on the arm and saying, “RYAN, THERE IS SOMEONE IN OUR FRONT YARD.” That is not how you want to be waked up. She was looking out the window in our bedroom. I went running down the hall, flipped on the outside lights, went out the front door and immediately smelled the fact that something was on fire. When I processed what was happening, I saw vehicles lining the road beside and now in front of our house. I walked up the road beside our house, following the flashing lights that were illuminating the tree tops on this still dark morning, and standing in a neighbor’s driveway, I watched the firemen (and one fire woman) put out the last of the fire in the charred remains of the house. As I stood in the crowd of about 20 people or so, we began talking. The conversation went something like this: “Hi, I’m so and so, I live in that house over there.” “I’m so and so, I live over here.” “I’m Ryan, I live down here at the corner.” We did not know each other. What has happened, that I have been in a house over 4 years now, and the only people I know are my immediate neighbors and the church members that live on my street? Growing up, we knew EVERYONE on our street. We knew about their families. We knew about their jobs. We knew what was going on in their lives. All of the kids played in an empty lot together. There was a tremendous sense of community. What happened? Now, I know that there are places where this community exists. I see it and envy it. I love Cottonwood and the community they have there, but I also know that there are community association fees that are charged to the residents that help create resources to make that happen. Growing up, it seemed to happen so naturally, so organically.

I think the culprit, yet again, in this situation is a lack of margin in our 24/7 world in which we live. We live in a world where we never let off the accelerator of life. We live in a world where we can tweet a message to someone on our electronic device halfway around the world, but we cannot go over to our neighbor and ask them how things are going in their life.

Standing in that driveway at 5 am, with margins that tragedy had created for us to build relationships, I was reminded of a similar time in recent history when tragedy built margins into our lives – 9/11. It was fresh in my mind as in most of yours, as we were in the early hours on September 12th. On that day in 2001, our country was in a literal sense forced to STOP. Airline traffic was stopped. A lot of mass transit was stopped. Businesses shut down. People were urged to stay home. It was an awful day. But not unlike my morning, there was something wonderful that happened in this midst of this tragedy – our lives gained MARGIN again, even if only for a couple of days, and we filled it with important things. When tragedies hit, they remind us of things that are truly important in our lives. They draw our attention to areas we may have been neglected. In the aftermath of 9/11, people used that margin to strengthen their faith and return to church, and people began taking their other relationships more seriously as well. I was on my way up to Asbury Seminary when the attacks hit, and I got to school only to find that classes had been canceled. I remember vividly, though, the fact that people were spending time together. They were finding love and support in the form of others. People were flocking to the chapel, where there were no formal activities, but people came and were just sitting there with each other, trying to make sense of this TOGETHER. I think most of us did similar things on that day – we picked up the phone and called the people we love the most and let them know that. We made plans to go visit. We gained clarity on what was important in our lives – relationships.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus is in his usual teaching mode, and he gives us a valuable lesson as to what is important in life. He has been traveling, and he stops in to stay with his close friends Mary and Martha. Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus are basically family to Jesus. He loves these three dearly. When he arrives, Martha jumps into hostess mode. Jesus is here, and she wants to roll out the red carpet for him, so she scurries around and begins the work and preparation to make sure that Jesus has everything that he needs and that they are doing their best to show him hospitality. I can relate to Martha. I come from a long line of Martha's both literally and figuratively. MY grandmother was named Martha, and when guests came over, she was doing that same thing. The same goes for my dad, getting together more food than an army could eat, making sure everyone has everything they could possibly need, and if you come over to my house I feel the same – I want the house clean and all of your needs met, and will run myself into the ground doing it. I would also be like Martha in the sense that I would grow angry if I felt others in my house weren't pulling their weight in getting ready. But when Martha calls her sister Mary to task on this, Jesus has a message for her: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, and Mary has found it and it won't be taken away from her." Mary made sure there was margin in her life to foster her relationship with her friend Jesus.

Jesus made sure to point it out as an opportunity to show what is truly important in life. Let me ask you this: When you have had meaningful encounters with people you love, do you look back and remember how clean your kitchen floor was, or do you remember how much you delighted in their company? How many times have I been so consumed with things that aren't important and complained aloud or in my mind that others aren't consumed with these insignificant things that I am?

What beautiful moments are you missing in life because you are “too busy”? If your world came crashing down around you today, what regrets would you have? Would those regrets be centered around not enough time spent at work, or not enough soccer or band practices that you have taken your kids to, or not enough possessions purchased, or your kitchen floor not clean enough?

Or, would you regret that you didn't stop and build more margin into your life to nurture and grow those most important relationships in your life? Would you think about how you had not invested in your marriage? Hadn't spent time with your parents? Hadn't invested in your kid's lives? Would you have wished you had gotten to know your neighbors and been involved in the lives more of the people at church and work?

There are indicators. I know that when I am not spending enough time with him, Tyler lets me know. He becomes clingy and pouty, and he has more fears about being in his room when I have not been around as much. He tells me. When I have not spent the time with Heather that I should, she lets me know, too, by the number of suitcases packed with my clothes that are left on the back steps...

But seriously, here is a basic truth of life – you can't have healthy relationships unless you invest time in them on a consistent basis. That means you have to build margin into your life to have time for these relationships.

One of the things we have to do is to set boundaries in our lives. We have to do better at setting clear priorities of what is important in our lives. That should begin with our relationship with God, which we will talk about next week, but then it is our family and friends, and PEOPLE in general - people are important. And once we set those priorities, then we draw boundaries around them and put that time with them off limits to other demands.

Creating margin in our life for relationships in reality means saying NO. First of all, it means at times saying NO to television and movies and Facebook and other technology. It means making conscious choices on who you are going to disappoint so you are not always disappointing those people who are closest to you.

It means being clear, like Mary, on those things that are of importance in life and not losing sight of them, so we don't have to wait until the next tragedy to happen to jar us back to our senses.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

AMEN