

Do you ever find yourself feeling distracted? What is it that distracts you?

I was early in ministry. It was during Lent, getting close to Holy Week and the hectic pace of that time of year in the ministry. I hadn't spent much time with my family. It was toward the end of the day, I was getting ready to head home and be with my family for a couple of hours before I returned to work.

That was when the call came over the intercom from Karla, the Administrative Assistant at the church. She said, "Scott, there is a person here who is asking for help, can you talk with him."

I was ready to go. I was ready to leave. But, I could help. So I said, "Sure, I will be right there."

I went down to the main office and I met Charlie. It was clear that what Charlie wanted more than Financial Assistance, was a chance to visit. So, he came to my office and we sat down.

He started talking. And he kept talking.

But, unfortunately, I wasn't doing a good job of listening. I was distracted. I was thinking about my family. I was thinking about the tasks I needed to get done. I was thinking about other things.

Then Charlie just stopped. He looked at me and said, "Young pastor. I know you are busy. But the least you could do is listen to me."

Charlie had me. I remember being jolted out of my distraction and mentally I came back to my office. I apologized to Charlie. I apologized for being distracted. I am not proud of my actions on that day. Have you ever been distracted? What is it that distracts you?

We live in a world, where if we are not careful, many things can distract us. All around us we see people dealing with pain, with struggles, with grief and illness. We see people struggling with work and trying to figure out how to make ends meet. We see people struggling with parenting their children. There are so many distractions. There are so many things that, if we aren't careful can move us away from living a life of faith.

In our scripture lesson for today, the author of Matthew has Jesus speaking to people who are at risk of being distracted. You see, in Matthew's church to follow Jesus meant that many of those early Jewish Christians had to face some huge obstacles. One of those obstacles was running the risk of the rest of their family rejecting them.

Being a Christian in the days of the early church meant that you just might lose your family. You just might lose much of what had been important to you. So this passage is written to encourage people to focus and stay faithful.

One of the first reminders of this passage is to be welcoming. It is to do in our life, what I did not do with Charlie. It is to notice and to welcome.

I have been told in the past that one of the reasons it is difficult for people from Asia to come to the United States is that we get so caught up in ourselves, in doing what we do, that we don't acknowledge people who are walking by us. In Asia when you are walking down the street, it is important to acknowledge others by nodding to them.

We don't live in Asia, but in the church, we can certainly be welcoming of others and acknowledge them. When we come across someone we haven't met in the church, we can smile at them. We can say hello to them. We can even hold out our hand and say, "Hi, I am Scott. What is your name?"

When someone is sitting in the place we like to sit, we can smile at them and either sit next to them, or we can smile at them, welcome them and find a new place to sit. It might even give you a different perspective for the day.

What this author of Matthew is telling us is that when we welcome others, we enlarge our world. We enlarge our understanding of God. We enlarge our Community and we help to build God's Kingdom.

Noticing and welcoming others is a key to help us stay focused and not be so distracted. **The second reminder of this passage that can help us is to see those who are in need and offer help.** Matthew says, whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one in need, they will not lose their reward. Whoever does something so small as giving a cup of cold water is doing something for God and for God's Kingdom. Are you willing to see how others around you may be hurting? Are you willing to extend compassion in the name of God?

There is an old story that comes out of World War II. Some US soldiers had a friend who was shot on the field of battle and he died. They didn't want to just leave him out in the field, so they made a crude casket for him and carried him to the nearest church, which just happened to be Roman Catholic.

When they got a hold of the priest and asked for permission to bury their friend in the cemetery the priest asked, "Is he a Christian?"

"Yes," Came the answer.

"Is he Roman Catholic?"

"No, he is a protestant."

"Then he can't be buried in the cemetery. He can be buried next to the cemetery though."

His friends were disappointed. But they thought that was better than nothing. So they went outside the fence of the cemetery and buried their friend. They had a brief service of prayer and offering him to God. They decided to spend the evening in that community before they continued on.

All night the priest struggled with the decision he had made. He struggled with how guilty he felt for denying these young men the privilege of burying this young, Christian soldier in the cemetery.

When the soldiers woke the next morning and went to pay their final respects to their friend before they left, they were stunned, because at first, they couldn't find where they had buried him. Until they noticed that the fence had been moved. It had been enlarged, by the priest in the night, to include their friend.

They went, found the priest, they all hugged. Then they went on their way.

When we find a way to live with compassion, when we find a way to enlarge our field of vision to include those who are hurting, the reward of that faith is that we become a part of a community. We become a part of a movement that is larger than us. It is a part of God's community. It is a part of God's kingdom.

So today I find myself wondering, even in the midst of life's distractions, are you willing to live with hospitality and compassion?

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen