

**Getting a Family to Function: Balancing Demands**  
**Hebrews 13:1-8**  
**Rev. Susan Bresser**  
**May 12/13, 2007 – Mother’s Day**

Soon after I started working here at this church, a parishioner – a woman – called me and wanted to meet. The working mother of 3 very active boys, she said to me, “How do you do it? How do you balance everything? You make it look so easy.” I did one of those “who, me?” I think I laughed out loud and said, just as loudly, “Are you talking about me? You can’t be serious.”

The truth was she was serious. She felt her life had become so unbalanced that she needed some stabilizing, she needed wholeness, she needed the world to step away and her spirituality to come back in, and she looked to me – representing the church – to guide her. I was dumbfounded for a long time about how she really believed I had it all together. I was completing seminary, commuting to Chicago, working at the Sun Prairie church, had 3 children and all that goes along with 3 children. I was so out of sync myself that I could hardly wrap my head around wholeness. It just wasn’t a part of my experience and wasn’t a part of my vocabulary. I then realized that she assumed that because I’m the pastor, I must have it all together.

My world is nothing like it was 9 years ago when I was a seminary student. We all live through stages, and the stage of completing seminary is over. That’s all behind me. I do have a better sense of balance and wholeness, but I also have a personality type that thrives on chaos. So for me, sometimes it means balancing the two. I also make choices in my life, quite frankly, that help build up the demands on my life and my time. We all do that. We make choices. Here are some examples:

- How many activities can I get my children involved in? ... Because I don’t want them to miss out on opportunities
- How many other projects can I add on to my already limited free time?
- How many other commitments can I say yes to that will interrupt my family time, my sleep time, my Sabbath time?

- How many extra jobs can I take or much how overtime can I work? Because in my quest to keep up with the Jones, I need to pay for that lifestyle.

We make choices. We all make choices that help build up the demands and then we become frustrated when our lives seem so unbalanced.

I currently live in a world right now that is very Erma Bombeck-ish. That's the place where I currently live. Do you remember Erma Bombeck? She had a syndicated newspaper column about her daily struggles as a mother, a wife, a working woman, and all the demands placed on her life. She is famous for saying: "My second favorite household chore is ironing. My first being hitting my head on the top bunk bed until I faint." I have bunk beds in my house ... there's some truth to that statement.

I am a pastor, but I'm also a wife, a mother, a daughter, a friend ... all of these different titles have responsibilities. When the question is asked of me, "How do you manage to balance all the demands? You make it look so easy," I just smile and say, "how 'bout them Brewers?"

I've had many moments, as I know all of you have, too, where you feel like you're starring in your own sitcom ... When chaos reigns and disaster strikes.

When Margaret was a freshman in high school, Eva a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Patrick Marsh, and John a 1<sup>st</sup> grader at Northside, I had a baby. At the time of this story, Henry was 4 mos old. One morning, my husband, Brent, took Margaret to school and then went on to his job ... not sure where he was working that day (he's a substitute teacher) ... Eva carpooled with the neighbors, and John walked next door to Northside. It was time for me to get ready for the day – which meant a day at church – and I had to get dressed, clean up breakfast dishes, fold laundry and get Henry ready for daycare. I opened up the backdoor to let the big dog in and out ran the little dog. She's not the sharpest knife in the drawer. She's a beagle. Her name is Brigit. What saves her is how darn cute she is. She's usually hooked up to her chain in the backyard so she doesn't run away. On this morning, she ran away. And she kept running. Her little ears were just a-floppin' in the breeze. I know in her little brain she was singing, "free at last, free at last!"

She ran through the backyard and right to the playground at Northside Elementary School where 100 or so small children, who love small dogs, were playing outside before the first bell rang. I'm chasing after her, in my bathrobe, screaming BRIGIT, COME ... COME, NOW! The kids

on the playground start joyfully yelling: BRIGIT COME ... COME ... COME. Who would you run to? A screaming madwoman or a bunch of happy little children? The school bell rings. A little boy opens the fifth grade door to Northside and in runs Brigit. I have a baby in the house and a beagle in the school.

In record timing, I'm back in the house, throwing some clothes on, grabbing the baby, and running – RUNNING – to Northside. I don't even think I had shoes on. I run in through the main door and the principal, Mrs. Ward, is walking down the hall. She looks at me and says, "I think I just saw your dog," as if it happens everyday! Brigit did live to see another day, but only by the grace of God!

Now this is not a normal day in my house, but it does typify some of the chaos. Chaos and demand can be two different things, but chaos certainly adds to the pressure of the demands.

The bottom line, the million dollar question, is how do I find balance in a world of extremes?

Sometimes everyday experiences threaten our sense of balance. That's life, but how we respond is what makes or breaks us.

Here's what I know about balancing demands:

1. It is good to have a sense of humor. Maybe we shouldn't take ourselves so seriously. So what if there are bugs in the ice cube trays because John is trying an experiment. Or so what if there's chapstick on the cat's rear end. Life's too short. Erma Bombeck says: When a child is locked in the bathroom with water running and he says he's doing nothing but the dog is barking, call 911.

2. It's good to have a church life. It's good to have a faith community. It's good to have connections with Christian friends who can help you see the reality of life. Sometimes church becomes one of the demands. We're very well aware of that. But we still stress and understand that the power of human connection is what's crucial in a life of faith because God created us to be connected.

3. Incorporated in my church life, even before I became a pastor, was a life of prayer. Prayer, for me, is really a way of living. It's another one of the ways I connect with God. Walking from my

back door to the clothesline to hang up clean laundry is a form of prayer for me, as I feel the sunshine and warmth. My counting to ten when I get mad at a kid is a prayer for me ... a breathing prayer. Riding in the car by myself or riding in the car connecting with a family member is a form of prayer. It's very intentional, but it's also very much incorporated in the daily struggles and the daily hubbub of living. My prayer life probably grounds me the most.

4. I think sometimes we just have to say NO. I think in our lives there are so many competing demands on our time that we just have to stand up and say NO, for ourselves but especially for our children. This coming from the woman who has YES written on my forehead! Sometimes we just have to sit back and prioritize what's really important.

The biggest wake up call for me came during the planning of a funeral for a woman who had died. I met with her adult children and asked them to describe for me their experiences of growing up with this woman. What did she teach you? What were her values? What kind of a mom was she? What kind of legacy does she leave? They sat with blank faces. Finally one of the children answered: "I'm sorry; we don't have anything to tell you, other than I guess she clothed us and fed us and provided us with shelter. Other than that, she worked all the time and spent more time on her other commitments, then she did her family." That broke my heart! When I die, I want my children to say: "she spent time with us, teaching us, guiding us, and loving us." I realize that life is not always clear-cut and that circumstances happen, but you can bet that that funeral meeting was a wake-up call because what it clearly pointed out to me is: we have choices.

5. In our struggle to balance demands, we search and search for wholeness. We spend a lot of time, money, energy, resources looking for centeredness and stability. It's already been given to us. His name is Jesus and he, and his saving grace, has been given to us because God loves us that much.

I chose the scripture for today because it reads well for Mother's Day. It's really about priorities and remembering what's important in life. It's really about reminding us that Christ is our center and he will never leave us or desert us and with Christ as the center in our lives we never have to be afraid about what tomorrow brings or about how many demands are placed on our living.

When our lives are Christ-centered, we live with hope – a phenomenal gift we need to have in this day and age.

I love Erma Bombeck, probably because my mother loved Erma Bombeck and faithfully followed Erma's career. Erma died 11 yrs ago but certainly left behind a tremendous legacy of humor and reality. Another quote from Erma: "When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me'".

Happy Mother's Day. Amen.