

Psalm 46:10

“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Dear Children of our heavenly Father,

I can remember it like it happened just a few days ago, but it actually happened about 10 years ago. I had went to Madison to visit someone in the hospital who wasn't doing very well. I had the opportunity to comfort one of God's people during a very tough part in their life. I was on my way home and I was taking Highway 12 through Cambridge and Lake Mills. As anyone who has traveled to Madison knows, the traffic can get a little busy at times. Because of that I was running a little late for my next appointment and my mind was occupied with the visit I had just made on this member who was struggling and my mind was thinking about a lot of things – maybe a few too many things. In the midst of this busy scene, I noticed a lot of flashing lights in my review mirror, and realized it was me the police office was looking for me. As he came to me, he asked if I knew how fast I was going and I said, I think I was going around 65 miles an hour. He proceeded to point out to me that the 65 mile an hour zone had ended about a mile before this point and the speed limit was now 55. In midst of all the things going on, I had missed the important sign that said the speed limit was now 55, and it took the officer and the ticket to remind me to slow down..

As we begin another Advent Season, today is the first of three sermons under the theme, “Advent Adversaries” We want to take a look at some of the things that the devil uses to rob us of the Advent and Christmas spirit, the spirit of anticipation and spiritual preparation for the Lord's coming at Christmas and his second Coming on Judgment Day. Today we are going to look at one of the biggest adversaries that the devil uses during this Advent season which is the frantic pace of activity that we call busyness. Our devotion for today will draw on that thought:

Theme: Advent Adversaries -- Busyness

In the God's Word that we are going to see through the eyes of the Psalm writer a reminder from our Heavenly Father that commands us to slow down and calm down as we try and keep things in perspective. The Psalm writer wants us to remember what's important, and more importantly who's important. **“Be still and know that I am God”** is what God writes in Psalm 46:10. God says to **“Be still”**. Put the brakes on to all of our busyness. Don't let the inner fears and pressures of the world and our sinful flesh cause us to panic. Bear in mind what this season is all about. It is not about us and presents and decorations. The writer says, **“I will be exalted.”** Key word being **“I”**. It is not about me! It is not about your family. It is not about presents. It is not about the food. God is to be exalted above everything else.

Most people have this false idea that if the devil is going to lead someone away from God that it will be through some big and ugly sin like greed, lust, drunkenness or some other horrible sin, but the truth is that while each of those sins are wrong and condemning and it is good to avoid them. Often times we fail

to see that the devil is just as successful in leading hearts and minds of Christian people away from the Lord in far more subtle ways. One of those subtle ways is through distracting activities which though innocent in of itself can divert our attention away from God.

If you remember the parable of the sower and the seed, in the one example the seed was choked out by the cares and concerns of this life. Jesus made it clear that this little concern here and that little concern over there can crowd God right out of a person's life. The doing of extra activities is never a sin, only the irritability, the anxiety, and overall loss of a spiritual focus that goes with it is a sin. Doing too many right things can cause us to end up doing them with the wrong attitude, or like Martha from our Gospel lesson, who was filled with the troubles and cares of this world where she lost sight of the most important thing -- which was Jesus who was sitting right in her own house.

I don't know if it is just me, but things seem busier now than ever before – especially during the Christmas season. Some of the stores already have the Christmas supplies out and advertised in September or early October. There are so many added pressures to buy, wrap and somehow pay for the perfect gifts. There are cards to purchase and send out with the family picture and story added to let everyone know how the family has grown in the last year. There are cookies to bake, parties to attend, houses and trees to decorate – both inside and out. There is the extra traffic on the roads and at the Malls. And we haven't even got to the extra special services at Church.

Again, let's be clear that these are not wrong and sinful. There are many who truly enjoy this time of the year and like battling crowds to find the right deal and the perfect thoughtful gift. I am not the Christmas Scrooge. But way too often it is this frenzied pace that can last up to two months that in many people kills the very Christmas joy God intended for us. Next time you are out shopping take a good look at the faces of the people shopping. Can you find 10 in a hundred who truly seem upbeat about what they are doing? Way too often what you see is lots of anxiety both in the store and in the parking lot and at the cash registers. You see exhausted moms trying to keep track of presents, their kids and their busy schedules. It is not surprising that many people actually have come to dread and even hate this Advent season because of all the busyness associated with them.

So the Psalm writers words blink out like a Bright Neon sign, **“Be Still” “Be Still” “Be Still” “Exalt God” “Exalt God” “Exalt God”**. With that in mind can we find a happy medium? Is it possible to be busy without being buried to the point of exhaustion? Can we have Christmas and Advent activities without frustration and stress? The answer is found in the fact that we need to avoid extremes. We need to find the middle ground. It is most likely not a great idea to try and have the best Christmas Decorations in the whole city or to have the best presents under the Christmas tree, or to have the best Christmas party of the whole family. I believe that we can do all this if we keep a clear perspective of Christmas in mind.

The first antidote to busyness is quiet consideration and a calm assessment of what's important. Sometimes this is the hardest part. Like the police officer who through flashing lights and a ticket helped me to realize that I need to slow down and pay attention, we need to make God and his Word the focus of this season and every season in our life. Take a deep breath and **“Be Still”**. When we are still, what do we see? You see you won't find the true peace and joy this season was meant to give in being busy with no purpose. You will find true Advent and Christmas joy as we contemplate the promises God made and then fulfilled in his son Jesus.

The prophet Elijah had to learn this the hard way when God revealed himself to him. He learned that he didn't find God in the rushing wind or in the raging fire, but in the still small voice of His Word. And that is a good reminder for us. We still need to remember and learn that the true and lasting spirit of Advent and Christmas which is the peace that God sent in his Son is not found in outward and showy earthly things, but through a grateful heart slowed down enough to see what is actually important this time of the year.

“Be Still” can also bring another important thing out in our lives. We need to slow down and observe that we are truly sinners and that many of the things we do not only during this busy time of Advent and Christmas are sinful and not God-pleasing. In the silence of self-searching of our hearts we see that we need to repent of our sins as we humbly bow before the manger confessing that all my sins need forgiveness. **“Be still”** and realize that this baby came to take away those sins and that wrapped up in those swaddling clothes is my Savior and the Savior of the world. **“Be Still”** and reflect like Mary who pondered all these things in her heart to know that this season is a great time to thank and praise God for his love and mercy for me a lost sinner. **“Be still”** and make time to worship Christ as we spend time in his Word at home and in Worship.

The second thing we need to remember in the midst of this busy season is to remind us that this the time of the year to **“Exalt God.”** We have to remind ourselves whose celebration is this time of the year and what are trying to accomplish. Are we trying to impress others, to maintain traditions that are too difficult to keep going? Or are we seeking to exalt or give glory to our Savior and our King?

You can do all the right things for all the wrong reasons and if you don't glorify God in doing them then perhaps we are better in not doing some of those things. How many times during this busy time have we started out with the best intentions to decorate, to clean, to shop and then somewhere in the middle our best intentions turned into frustrations and loss of a true focus?

Take a moment and **“Be Still”** as you check your motives. If God is not the center of some of this busyness, then a refocus may be in order. Yes, it's OK and even fun to be busy, but is important to keep a clear perspective on our minds and lives. With God's help let the words of the Psalm writer **“Be Still”** be the criteria for moderation on busyness without meaningful purpose and then we truly may find the peace and joy that Jesus intended through his birth. Amen