

A sermon preached the Congregational Church of Almaden Valley,  
United Church of Christ  
San Jose, CA  
Date: April 25, 2010  
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Acts 9:36-43 (Psalm 23)

### *Touching the Reign of God*

There are so many demands upon our time. It seems whether we remain in the workforce, whether we work at home, whether we are students, or whether we are retired life wants to rush us along from one thing to the next. Is it possible to sense and accept grace or live grace-filled lives when life is rushing by? Like the old saying goes, “can we stop and take time to smell the roses?”

When I was in my twenties through my forties I had this concept or vision of my life that I would never retire. I think my father retired from being a school principal when he was in his early sixties. So that means I was in my mid-forties when my father retired; he was the first person really close to me who made that sometimes very difficult decision to leave the workforce. That was probably the time, too, when I began to think that maybe a retirement was possible in my future, too. You see, I had this concept of retirement that when you didn't have to get up to go to work every day you could just sleep in, have no plan for what you would be doing that day, and laze around the house all day! How many of you folks who are retired have this daily routine? Not one of you right? You see, that's why I thought I would never retire, because I thought to myself in my twenties through mid-forties that retirement would be extremely boring. So I thought to myself that I would just continue working in the paid workforce until the time I kicked the bucket.

Now that I'm in my mid-fifties and have known and been a pastor to many folks who are in this thing we call the “retired” category I realize that life for them still is filled with days of rushing to and fro from one thing to the next. In fact, most of the retired people I have known have told me that one day they are going to “retire from their retirement” and get some well-needed rest. In fact, a lot of retired folks I know say they work harder in their retirement and are busier than when they went to a job every day. There was this one fellow I've heard of whose name was Albert and was having his retirement party. He was the kind of person who could never turn down a request from somebody for help and who seemed to be in kind of a

perpetual manic stage always working. At the retirement party his boss told the crowd “Today we would like to thank Albert for his service to our company. Albert is someone who does not know the meaning of impossible task, who does not know the meaning of lunch break, who does not understand the meaning of the word “no.” So we have pooled our money together and bought Albert a dictionary.” (See [http://www.guy-sports.com/jokes/retirement\\_jokes.htm](http://www.guy-sports.com/jokes/retirement_jokes.htm))

Let’s think about the apostles and especially about Peter who are lesson from Acts this morning discusses. Our followers of Jesus were rushing around the countryside in first century Palestine spreading the Good News of knowing and following Jesus. Peter was healing folks, holding prayer meetings with new converts, laying hands on people to imbue them with the Holy Spirit, upbraiding folks for their shady business dealings (Acts 5), and generally adding more and more people every day to the way of Jesus. Peter had just finished healing a man who had been paralyzed for eight years when people came rushing up to him pleading with him to come and minister to a community who had lost one of their pillars, a woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas, in the Greek form. And the name Dorcas means “gazelle.” A gazelle, of course, is a beautiful antelope like animal that rushes along the African plains to speeds of up to fifty miles per hour and does it with such grace and beauty to watch them could take your breath away. Peter was now rushing off to be with a group of people who had lost their swift and beautiful and graceful gazelle. Our story of Acts tells us that Peter was asked to come to Joppa where Dorcas had died “without delay” and he left all that he was do and went immediately.

But now we come to a key part of this story. And this story is the first time that an apostle’s prayer had helped in raising someone from the dead. Dorcas was apparently a woman who was a living saint before she died. She made clothes for people and acted with great grace and charity toward all the people in her community. She was a pillar of strength and grace in the midst of people who probably had come to rely upon her for many acts of charity and generosity when she was alive. You can picture the type—someone who is constantly giving and doing things for people. Dorcus was a woman who probably worked from sunrise to sunset serving others. She might have been the center of social justice work in her community. This was a woman who was going to be missed terribly by her community and there would be a big hole in the life of the community after she was gone.

So Peter walks into the house in the upper room above the lower floor where the animals were kept in those days, a place of where people could retreat from the work and heat of the day’s labors to a cool place of rest. You can imagine the hub-bub that must have been happening in and around the

house when Peter arrived. There were probably people crying and bellowing in grief, people frantic who were wondering who could ever replace their grace-filled and beautiful Dorcas who did so much for everyone. Peter walks into the crowded room amidst wailing and weeping and all kinds of commotion and what is the first thing he does? He kicks them all out of the room. He clears the space of the all the rush and commotion and heightened emotional outbursts and bids them to leave he and Dorcas in peace. Peter takes some time from all the commotion and bustle to be quiet and at peace and at prayer. And the result is that life is restored in the midst of death. Resurrection in the midst of sadness and pain and confusion and fear happens after the taking some time to be alone, to enter into prayer and meditation, and to turn over life to God.

I found a wonderful poem that speaks to this kind of peace, or rather a way to help find peace. I often can find some peace in the midst of my rushing to and fro by stopping and taking time to read a poem, or a scripture passage, or just sit down with a book, and surely by just closing the door on my busy life to pray. The author of this poem is a man from Tennessee and often publishes his poetry on this wonderful website called "Goodreads." He goes by the moniker Knight0046 and he writes this about finding peace in his life through poetry:

*Finding Peace (adapted)*

by Knight0046 (at <http://www.goodreads.com/story/show/225874-finding-peace>)

Where is the peace that I seek?  
What will  
settle my heart  
ease my fears  
let me know that  
I'm alright?

Not my friends.  
While I  
love them,  
they add too much  
secrecy  
betrayal  
deceit

and temptation to my load.

So elusive is  
my peace,  
I see it,  
outside, in nature,  
free  
utterly and truly  
free.

For peace is freedom.

What keeps my freedom  
at bay?

Then...  
in the midst of  
my search,  
like a warm blanket  
on a cold winter day,  
I find it.  
It comes to me,  
warms my soul,  
stills my worried  
heart,  
and lets me know  
that I am not alone  
in the middle of my  
chaos  
insanity  
sin  
and hatred.

I am an island of refuge.  
My peace stops me  
in the middle  
of it all,  
making me realize  
that I rush for no reason;  
that I worry

about things that will die away.

The Spirit of Peace  
enlightens me  
and holds me up  
above  
the world  
my worries  
my hate  
my sin  
my chaos  
my insanity  
as they all flow  
away from my island  
and I can  
finally  
rest.

One of the most beneficial things to us, to people of faith, is that we know there is this ongoing almost parallel universe with our lives where there can be found great peace and comfort. Some of us call it the reign of God, the kingdom or *kin-dom* of God. With deliberation and intention we can step out of the sometimes harsh and hard times in our lives to be alone with God and let go of ourselves turning our life, and breath, and minds, and hearts over to the Spirit of peace and comfort buried deep inside us. There are many aspects to the reign of God where we can touch healing, and justice, but there is also a place for rest and peace and respite from the rushing of our daily lives. But, like Peter, we sometimes have to find a place to be alone, to seek quiet, and to open ourselves to healing power of God's peace. And only God's peace can restore us to life and the energy to face the work that God has called upon us to do. Whether we are students, workers at home or outside the home, retired or seeking retirement from our retirement there is a place, an upper room, if you will, of peace and comfort and restoration resting in the arms of time alone spent with God. Amen.