

“The Mindfulness of God”

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:1-9

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This passage from the book of Hebrews asks us to consider, to what we give our attention. Right at the beginning there is a command – we must pay greater attention, and since the Greek is superlative, it is calling us to give our greatest attention. Then a warning – so that we do not drift away. And finally a consequence – neglecting so great a salvation jeopardizes our escape. Escape is a fleeing for refuge, and we what we need to escape, according to verse 2, are two familiar words, transgressions and disobedience, whose Greek meanings add layers. Transgressions – the Greek word, parabasis, meaning “going wrongly, going astray - going over, overstepping.” (Bible Interlinear website) Disobedience: the Greek word parako-e is to “hear amiss” to hear wrongly, or to not pay attention.

Going wrongly, overstepping, hearing wrongly, unwillingness to hear, are all things that happen when we drift away, the phrase in Hebrews is a nautical term, to miss your mooring. To be out on the water and see where your place of safety, rest and refuge is, to know that is where you are supposed to be, perhaps even to want to get there in some part of you, but to drift right past it anyway. There is a consistent relationship in these first verses between what we miss – in our listening, in our steps, in our purpose, and how we miss-focus our attention.

The great, greatest, object of our attention, according to this text, is our salvation. From verse 3, this salvation “was declared at first through the Lord, and it was confirmed for us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.” The word of the Lord, the witness of the faithful, the wonders of God, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Word, wonders, gifts – Jesus, God, Spirit, the work of the Trinity on Trinity Sunday.

But we have a role in there too, “it was confirmed for us by those who heard him.” Our work, is to listen, look and receive. We are the Christian community who listens – hears and confirms the Word, looks - pays attention to the signs of God, and receives - is gifted by the Spirit. But the temptations to miss, neglect, drift away, are very very real. If attention to God’s word was an issue in the early Christian Community, it is closer to a crisis now, where our attention is now a product all on its

own, a multi-billion dollar industry where the goal is not just to get you to buy a pair of shoes anymore, but to get you to click and stay on a page long enough for your attention to be monetized. An industry ranks everything you see on a screen by its “adhesiveness” how long you stick on a site, a video, and word combinations you might google are analyzed by search market engineers for the likelihood of how much money they will make.

Our attention also becomes marketable data, as any of us know who googled something we thought about buying, only to have it end up on the top line of our gmail or the sidebar of our facebook page. How did they know?

There are algorithms that determine how long you’ll spend on a platform looking at, for example, cute puppies, yesterday I watched a 5-second video maybe 10-times in a row - a bear putting upright a traffic cone that fell over. <https://weather.com/news/trending/video/bear-picks-up-traffic-cone-in-alaska>

Research shows that moral outrage leads to the most adhesiveness, the most monetization from you and your attention, because it quickly ramps up emotion centers in the brain and indignant is a powerful one that keeps you clicking. As Ayad Akhtar writes in an The Atlantic Monthly article, *The Singularity is Here*, “we like to believe that we are shaping our world with our digital clicks but in reality we are being remade from within by all the unconscious priming of our impulses, the tiny pleasures of the text, buzz, post, click.” (much of the above paragraphs comes directly or summarized from here: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/12/ai-ad-technology-singularity/620521/>)

Maybe church is one of the last hour or so-long respites from the pull of the device, or maybe some of you have checked it already during the service, maybe even during the sermon....

On Trinity Sunday, we consider how the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity exists like a Platonic form, it is the truest idea of the concept of relationship, and from it we draw all the versions, the lesser versions of relationships that we encounter on earth. And those relationships are all about attention. Here is what attention is like in the Trinity:

God’s relationship in the Trinity is not one of partial attention, God is eternally mindful. That attention is not commodified or monetized, the person is not an object.

There is no drifting away or neglect. Nothing is heard amiss or overstepped, listening is constant, eternal even.

So maybe one way to understand the experience of salvation, during our earthly life, the escape and refuge we seek, is to apply all of these internal workings of the relationship of the Trinity to how God treats us:

God's relationship with you is not one of partial attention. God is eternally mindful of you.

God does not and will not use you in the negative meaning of that phrase, as an object to be used by someone for selfish, even malevolent gain.

God's focus on you does not waver or drift, God does not watch you drift past without throwing a line. You are not lost to God, even when you feel the most lost.

God hears you, always and forever, God listens and God cares about what you say, what you feel, what you've been through, even the hard stuff, even the hardest stuff. That is the kind of attention that exists within the Trinity. This is the kind of attention that God gives you.

How can we make room to give that kind of attention to God?

At our Bible Study with Shiloh Baptist church, Deacon Willie Griffin shared that he hasn't listened to the radio in his car for 40 years, in his words, so that he can focus on God's goodness. To attend to the relationship. His attention is open for listening, looking and receiving.

I really like my music, so that one is tough, but I commit to ending my recent habit of bringing my phone with me on dog walks in the woods, I used to not, then I did for probably an important reason, then it drifted into a mindless habit.

Bring my attention back to mindfulness of God in the woods, on listening, looking and receiving. Maybe it's a practice of praise and worship, maybe one spurred by creation, like the writer of Psalm 8 encountering the majestic name of the Lord, and responding "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what is a human that you are mindful of him, mortals that you care for them?"

Awe, and acclamation, wonder and witness in the Psalmist's words after looking at the heavens, moon and stars.

Also Psalm 8 is literally on the moon, point of interest, Apollo 11 astronauts left goodwill messages from leaders of 73 countries on a disc a bit bigger than a quarter and the Vatican's entry was – Psalm 8. Go out to see the June strawberry supermoon

rise this Tuesday and Recite Psalm 8 as you imagine that scripture out there. (found on internet)

Maybe you make room for attention to God through new actions of faith and practice, of service, like helping refugees resettle, joining churches and going on Mission Trips and seeing what God does with those kind of new and renewed discipleship commitments that prioritize our attention, that anchor us more fully on God, Jesus and the Spirit.

As you, me and we together seek to turn our attention more fully to God, Remember our attention as the Christian community should be as those who listen – hears and confirms the Word, look - pays attention to the signs of God, and receive - is gifted by the Spirit.

And this matters, because salvation is found in the harbor of God's presence, a mooring that is close enough to see but we can miss it if we are not listening to instructions as we approach, looking in the direction of the dock, and receiving the rope as it is thrown. And all of that requires that we pay the greatest attention.