



**March 25, 2007**

John 12:1-8

Philippians 3:4b-9

## “Stop and smell the roses, and do it now!”

When I was a girl, my brother had a white mouse for a pet for a brief period of time. We kept him in a little wire cage we set on the floor in the kitchen. I used to lie down on the linoleum and watch him for hours. I loved the way his nose and whiskers would twitch, his quick, lively motions. I admired his inexhaustible energy as he ran on his treadmill. But I began to worry, eventually, that he might hurt himself with all that running. My mother assured me it was natural for him to need the exercise, and he would be OK. He never was harmed by the exercise, but he did escape fairly soon after we got him, and got stuck behind the stove somehow, and died. It was a very sad moment in my childhood.

Today, I remember that little rodent and his exercise wheel. Are we like him in any way?

Our lives ARE a little like my white mouse's life. We are consumed and busy and rushing here and there—racing away on our treadmills. Some of us use ACTUAL treadmills—and even go off the deep end with exercise. Most of us, of course, are so exhausted by work, and studies and jam-packed schedules that we never find the time to exercise, but feel as tired as if we had. More tired, actually—so we still don't exercise (we're TOO TIRED to exercise) and we get rounder as the years pass.

Even our entertainment can become part of this frenzy. Shopping is one example. I know some of you will tell anyone who will listen that you HATE shopping, but you might not hate all FORMS of shopping. Some of us enjoy clothes shopping. Others love those craft stores, or stores with household items and furniture. Others are crazy about Menards and Home Depot—or greenhouses and landscaping

stores. Some folks can get lost for hours in music or bookstores, and other people enjoy electronics stores. Some of us like wandering through new subdivisions, looking at model homes, dreaming for the future. Car dealerships draw others with that same appeal.

The problem with this is that we live in a mode of dreaming and working to acquire things. We study to get knowledge to lead us into jobs that will give us the means to realize our dreams. The problem is we find ourselves so busy working and managing the demands of daily life, that sometimes we don't even have time to enjoy the "things" we've eventually acquired!

We drive ourselves to acquire "things" that aren't things, as well. Things like honors and sales records, high school awards and trophies- various forms of success. I am amazed at how little free time many dedicated high school students have. Their extracurricular activities along with the demands of numerous classes leave barely enough time for adequate SLEEP. We run round and round like the little white mouse on our treadmills. But, unlike the mouse, we may find ourselves pushing too hard, running too fast for too long, until we actually do harm to ourselves. Even our involvement in church can add to the rat race.

This is not God's plan for our lives. God does not call us to extinguish our lives from exhaustion on a treadmill. Jesus once said, "What use is it to gain the whole world, if you are losing your soul?"

The apostle Paul knew about this. He wrote a letter to the church community at Philippi that reveals his insights.

In the passage we heard this morning, Paul recounts his past religious life. He makes it clear that far from having a past he might want to hide, his personal history was one that would ordinarily lead to pride. He had lived the life of a strict, observant Jew. In his place and time, he was seen as a great success and influential person. He was a master at working the treadmill. But then his letter suddenly shifts. Paul tells us that after becoming a follower of Christ, his whole perception of gains and losses was completely changed. Now, knowing Christ is everything, and all the world's goodies are nothing but garbage. It's not WHO you are that matters (an observant Jew or modern success), it's not WHAT you possess that matters (not knowledge, not "things"), it is WHO you know, in the person of Christ and in the love of God that matters.

We are an exhausted, hard-working, well-meaning, but at times deluded bunch of people. The ONLY thing, I mean it--- the ONLY thing of true value is love: the

relationships of love we have with each other; the relationship of love we have with God.

This became very clear to me in a time of crisis in our family. Near the end of my second year of seminary, my husband lost his job. We had a house, two cars with payments, and four kids, grades 3,6,9 and 11. It seemed a great catastrophe. Then, one of our daughters needed brain surgery. And suddenly—hey, we knew what mattered. Jobs, houses—who cared about THOSE? People and the love we share—that's all we cared about, really.

There are times in life to work, to apply ourselves. There are times to be prudent and careful and cautious with our money. But there are times to let go of all that—to enter into relationships with God, people, animals and nature as though there were no tomorrow. The reading from John's gospel today speaks about this.

Jesus was nearing the end of his earthly life. His coming to Jerusalem for the Passover was an act of courage, for it was clear that the authorities viewed him as a criminal. Jesus neared the city, stopping just outside in the village of Bethany, where his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. After they shared a meal, Mary came with a costly perfume, and poured it over Jesus' feet, an expression of her love for him. Judas objected- this perfume could have provided for many poor people. Don't misunderstand Jesus' words in response to Judas. When he said, "you will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me," he was not telling us to neglect the poor. Jesus was quoting from Hebrew Scripture; Deut. 15:11: "The poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and the poor in the land."

Jesus was saying, some things you only have one chance to do, one time to say. Helping the poor could be done at any time, and should be. Showing her heart's love for Jesus had to be done before Mary saw the cruel cross of Calvary take the life of her friend.

God tells us day by day to do things that we won't have a chance to do later. He points out moments to embrace his creation and express our love for each other. We need to stop and smell the roses and DO IT NOW!!! (LITERALLY!)

(Take time here to remind people of the flowers at the entrance when they arrived for worship—how many saw them? Smelled them? --- pass flowers around so they can smell them NOW!)

WE need to tell people we love them and DO IT NOW!! We need to savor all that is precious to us, drink it in and DO IT NOW!

Friends, I have an image for myself of the kind of spiritual maturity I hope one day to achieve. In the spring and summer I often find myself on the road at the time when the sun is going down. I'm picking up a family member somewhere, or heading home from a church meeting, or on my way to a church meeting. I'll turn a corner to find myself facing a gorgeous sunset of pinks, roses, purples and fiery reds and orange. A voice inside me says, "Stop the car. Get outside. Stand and watch this beauty until it fades." But I don't stop because I don't want to be late to my meeting or picking up the person counting on me. But someday I hope I WILL stop. Being a little late is ok. God wants me OFF the treadmill of compulsive activity.

May God's Spirit guide us to know when to stop, and why. May Christ's love teach us to avoid the treadmill. And may we learn to show our love for Jesus by pouring out for Christ and for the world those precious perfumes God has placed in our hands and DO IT NOW! Amen. Amen.