

Message: “Name the Disease”, Week One of “What’s Keeping You? Series”, presented by Reverend Kristen Lowe on 02-19-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

Isaiah 38:1-8

This is an interesting passage because it reminds us of a couple of things. First, neither a person’s greatness nor their goodness will exempt them from sickness and death. We also discover that prayer is a salve for every sore both personal and public. When Hezekiah was distressed by his enemies he prayed; now that he is sick he prays. We are reminded that we need to go to our Heavenly Father for comfort in times of distress. No matter what the outcome, we are God’s. We never pray in vain.

In those days Hezekiah became very sick. He knew he was about to die. Isaiah went to see him. Isaiah was the son of Amoz. Isaiah told Hezekiah, “The Lord says, ‘Put everything in order. Make out your will. You are going to die soon. You will not get well again.’”

Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall. He prayed to the Lord. He said, “Lord, please remember how faithful I’ve been to you. I’ve lived the way you wanted me to. I’ve served you with all my heart. I’ve done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

A message from the Lord came to Isaiah. The Lord said, “Go and speak to Hezekiah. Tell him, ‘The Lord, the God of King David’, says, “I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. I will add 15 years to your life. And I will save you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will guard this city.

Here is a sign from me. It will show you that I will heal you, just as I promised I would. The shadow that was made by the sun has gone down ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. I will make it go back up those ten steps.” So the shadow went back up the ten steps it had gone down.

May God bless our hearts to receive his word? Amen.

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Many of you have been so kind to ask me how my sabbatical was.

Let me first start off by talking about King Hezekiah. He was descended from King David and is also listed in the line of Jesus. He reformed his nation spiritually. He had already witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. He was a very religious man who believed in Yahweh, the God of David, Abraham and Isaac.

And now things are bad. Really bad.

He is sick to the point of dying. Jerusalem has been under siege and Isaiah, the prophet, comes to tell him that he is going to die. If this prophesy comes true, Hezekiah dies without an heir to the throne, in the full strength of his manhood, and with his nation in an unsettled state. Some scholars would even suggest that the king’s illness and the state of Jerusalem were tied together.

The prophet tells him to get his affairs in order. He is about to die... and so is Jerusalem.

The news of this must have been devastating!

Hezekiah had been busy. He had purified and repaired the temple, purged its idols, and reformed the priesthood. He worked to reestablish relationships by resuming the Passover pilgrimage and the tradition of inviting the scattered tribes of Israel to take part in a Passover festival. He sent messengers to Ephraim and Manasseh inviting them to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover.

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Knowing that Jerusalem would eventually be subject to siege, Hezekiah had been preparing for war for some time by fortifying the walls of Jerusalem, building towers, and constructing a tunnel to bring fresh water to the city from a spring outside its walls.

So... to lay it out, Jerusalem was under siege. The temple of the lord was under siege
Hezekiah’s body was under siege.

The prophet Isaiah tells him to get his affairs in order.

What does this mean for Hezekiah? With all sorts of things happening and all manner of responsibilities needing to be redirected and so many things to do... notice what Hezekiah does.

²Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall.

He couldn’t let anything keep him from having that moment. He humbly and privately prayed to God. And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

He believes the words of God’s prophet.

He remembers that God is the source of all life.

He turns first to God before anyone or anything else.

He states his case before God and asks for grace.

I believe that getting his affairs in order needed to start with first talking with God and being completely in God’s presence with no distractions – which is why, in his fragile state, he turns his head to the wall.

He was in the habit of talking to God. He was in the habit of listening to God through his prophets. He was in the habit of believing in God. And God told him to watch for a sign.

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How often now, in our world, do we talk to God and actually listen to God? How often do we look for the signs? What’s keeping us from actually noticing the signs?

God told Hezekiah that he would restore both Hezekiah and Jerusalem. And God gives him a sign.

In reflecting on this story of a leader concerned for his city. I thought about my own personal state and the state of the attendance and participation of our church. There was a decline last fall that continued over the winter.

There was a decline in my spirit. Personal struggles and the struggle to keep our church from falling under siege were depleting my spirit.

We are under siege from:

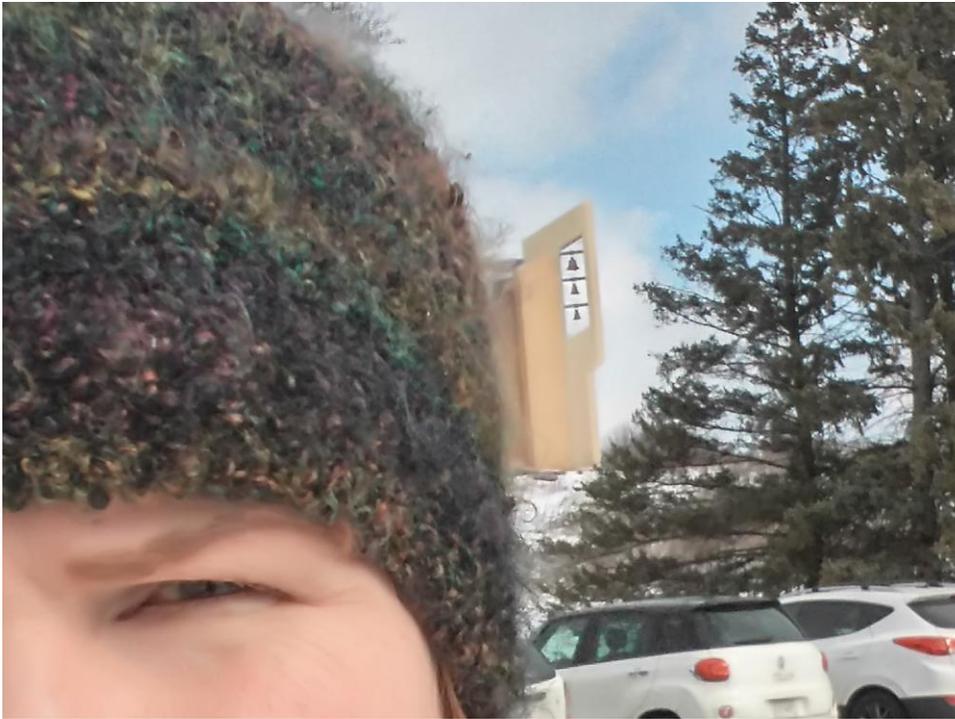
Growing apathy towards God.

Life competing for attention in the form of sports, vacations, school events and down time.

I took a cue from Hezekiah by turning my face to the wall. I needed to separate myself from the distractions on a very real level. I needed to model prioritized time with God. And then I needed space to listen.

I scheduled time away at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison.

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I couldn’t get comfortable or organized. I came down with a stomach-churning headache—my physical body was mirroring my mental and spiritual state. But what should I do?

So many options... but the internet doesn’t work. I grew restless. I made some tea.

Then I noticed the binder that told guests what to do on a personal retreat: practice mindfulness, listen to your body’s cues.

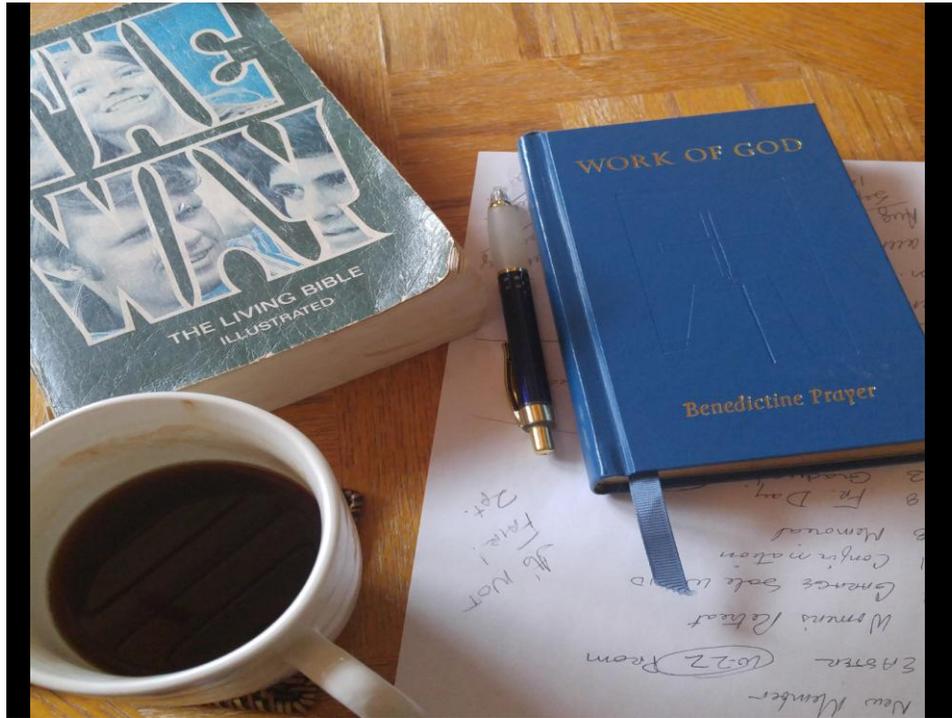


“I’m in rehab,” I thought, clutching the warm mug. I need to go through these withdrawals to be spiritually healthy again. What was keeping me from feeling well?

The disease...

Mental, physical and spiritual distractions. That’s what keeps us from God.

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I realize that being spiritually fit is not a once and done kind of thing. Just like having a healthy body; eating right, exercise and clean living is a lifestyle. You can't just do a bunch of sit ups and then get comfy on the couch and expect to feel vibrant. Likewise, enjoying the presence of God is a practice. Having a relationship with God is akin to any relationship. It must be nurtured.

I pray that as you look within, if you feel yourself beginning to feel the disease, you'll make the time to connect with God without the distractions. It's the balm that heals all wounds.