

It Takes Two Hands

Fourth Sunday in Lent, 2019

March 31, 2019

Luke 10:38-44

Rev. Sarah Campbell

So we got into the taxi at the airport and we were off! Heading into the city where we were to live for six months. The vehicle was crammed full with lots of luggage and two parents and two exhausted but awe struck girls, ages 12 and 14. They had never even been on a plane before and now this! They weren't sure what was more interesting to watch, the world going by outside, first on the outskirts of Rome, the beautiful landscape and goats, then the heart of the city, ancient and medieval architecture, and still the goats, and cars, trucks, motor scooters, doing the inimitable and strangely graceful Roman traffic dance, forget the lanes...or watch what was going on inside the cab—the driver was using one hand to hold the cell phone and the other hand to.... You guessed it to, to gesticulate!; to help him talk to the person on the cell phone and to us!... precious cargo on board and lots of it and a no hands driver! This was going to be a fun six months!!

This Lent we're doing interesting soul work, like we do every Lent, to help us restore balance to our lives, to the precious moments of this life we've been given. This Lent we are shining a light on how we use tech and reminding one another that just because you can...do something... doesn't mean you have to. There's a great scene in the movie "While We're Young" in which two couples are just becoming friends, one a 40 something couple and one a 20 something couple, they are out to dinner and as the conversation flows, a question arises about something trivial, and the older guy says, while pulling out his smart phone "I'll look it up!" And the younger guy says: "No that's too easy. Let's just not know..."

One young adult in the Lenten group after reading this week's article about Steve Jobs decided to become a minimalist smartphone user, just keeping the small number of features that do things she values and that the phone does particularly well and eliminating all the rest, including all those apps that make money from her attention. Just for Lent?: we inquired. She said: no I don't think so... for longer...

Tech and our souls. This Lent. The subject of course is vast. We've barely explored all of the unintended consequences of this remarkable technological revolution in our life time.... the erosion of democracy: foreign interference during our last presidential election time.... wealth and power concentration....surveillance capitalism... increasing political and social polarization.... Did you know that "the design of internet platforms can create and reinforce extremist beliefs? Their recommendation algorithms often steer users toward edgier content, a loop that results in more time spent on the app, and more advertising revenue for the company." But this is all for future conversation, this wondering about the effect of Tech on the soul of our society and of our nation. This lent is not about that. This Lent is about tech and your soul and my soul, our children's souls and grandchildren's souls, and tech and the soul of our church community.

Jesus says: "*Martha, Martha, You are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.*" Martha is multi-tasking, doing two things at once, actually three if you include getting angry at her sister, and preparing a meal, and listening to the wise teacher in her midst. Her mind is trying to do these three things. She will not be able to do any of them really well. Meanwhile, her sister Mary is fully present in the moment with this person in their home and her mind, heart, life is changing in that very moment. She will never be the same. Does Mary say to Martha? (And somehow this got lost in translation or in transmission of this story) Does Mary say: *Martha, just come and sit for a few moments. Then we will all help get dinner ready. Jesus, you don't mind cutting the tomatoes and cucumbers, do you?* Jesus, the wise teacher, is also fully present in that home, taking in the truth of their lives. He has turned off his smartphone and put it under a rock near the tree in the front yard. He knows that the mere presence of a cellphone even when not in use is enough to derail concentration and depth of thought. In this moment, there is need of only one thing....

"We are a culture committed to multi-tasking. It sometimes seems every aspect of life is being shaped so as to ensure it can be performed with one hand." Writes Rev. Sam Wells to whom I am indebted for the essence of this sermon, and hopefully you will feel the same.

"1600 years ago St. Augustin of Hippo distinguished between two kinds of things. One kind of thing we *enjoy*. These are the things that are worth having for their own sake. They aren't a means to an end: they're a joy in themselves. They're things that never run out. You don't have to make an argument for why they matter: they speak for themselves. The other kind of thing we *use*. Things we use aren't good for themselves—they're a means to some further end. They do run out. They serve only a limited purpose.

I want to suggest to you that what we grasp or take or juggle in *one* hand is what we *use*, and what we yearn for and treasure and shape our whole posture to receive and cherish is

what we *enjoy*. What we *use* only requires one hand: we can use a number of things at the same time. But to *enjoy* something, or someone, we really need *both* hands, because it takes all our concentration.

Martha wants to take this God moment with one hand while doing everything else at the same time; contrasted with Mary, who realizes that this God moment truly is a project that needs both hands.” (Wells)

More and more artists--leave it to the artists of course, they pour everything into their art to move us, transform us even,--they are demanding that we leave our smart phones behind and enter into the artist's sanctuary fully present. Did you read the article about the rock and roller Jack White who has banned smart phones from his concerts? If someone forgets to leave their phone at home, they supply a little bag, a new technology, called “yond'r bags”, in which to deposit the phone before they cross the threshold into the experience of the evening. Be here now, is the not so subtle message. “What happened at the concert” one reported, “is beautifully simple. People talked to each other before the show and between sets. They didn't stare at their phone in the bathroom. Only a handful went to the phone permitted zones near the bar. During his encore White took advantage of having his audience's rapt attention to implore them to clap along. ‘C'mon, he said, you don't have your hands full tonight.’ And at the very end, when White closed the show with his anthem song, there wasn't a sea of cameras in the air, there was a sea of waving hands” Rapturous....

Some of the best things in life, in the precious moments of this life we've been given, require both hands. Like holding a baby... so you can feel the heft of her chubby little body, and cozy your nose up against her soft cheek, and nuzzle her neck, smelling that sweet baby smell.... Like helping your old father get safely from the car into the restaurant where you will celebrate his 91st birthday.... Like playing an instrument, the cello, the bassoon, the bass, the French horn, the piano—more and more instruments are showing up in this church, coming out of the basement where they've been stored for a while, wanting to be part of the action, and so dragging their attached human along behind to church.... Kind of like all of the dogs coming into this church the last couple weeks, dragging their human behind for church photos.... Yep, it takes two hands to play these wonderful instruments, except for the organ perhaps. That takes hands, feet, elbows, whatever you can give it! And full concentration, of course...

Some of the best things in life require two hands... like reading a book. Did you know that sales of old fashioned print books are up for the third year in a row, while eBook sales have been declining? There's nothing like enjoying everything about the book, the heft of it, the aesthetic of the cover design and the font, turning the pages, marking spots with your pencil, doodling, and best of all, of course, dog earring!

Best things in life...two hands... like dancing, all kinds of dancing... like friendship... conversation... It's not just Italians who need their hands to talk and even, somehow, both hands to listen intently...

"Living life with both hands takes time... because what you receive with both hands takes longer to assimilate than what you grab with one. Above all, living with two hands takes gentleness—because treasuring moments, people or places with both hands, rather than grabbing them with one, means cherishing them, tenderly noticing their details, rejoicing in your presence with them." (Wells)

Really what we're talking about this Lent is joy... and the precious moments of this life we've been given... and the things which take both hands....Of course we don't face a simple choice between one handed or two handed living, or a choice between digital or analog living. It's not that simple. It's not an either/or. That ignores the complexity of life in the real world. Instead, we are faced with a decision of how to strike the right balance.

One of you, could be more, has resisted this year's Lenten theme. You are critical of this criticism of tech. For you, this hits a nerve. This technology is your livelihood and so much more. You are *also* the one who slipped a little business card into my daughter's hand last Wednesday evening after Taize, when you met my nine month old granddaughter. You said: "Here is my business card. If you want to experience the service next week. I'd be glad to hold her." The card lists several qualifications including: "experienced grandparent." You are the gentle man who, when needed, helps out Mona and Nada in the child care room. You are a baby holder. That takes two hands....

Amen

Important Sermon Feedback

I received this healthy, honest, helpful feedback to this sermon. A name was attached though I don't include it here.

Hi Sarah,

I wanted to reach out and give a perspective on the theme of your sermon from the parent of a person with disabilities. I loved the message as I heard it which was to be present and experience the things that are important in life. What was hard was that the points in the sermon were tied to using the term "two hands." I have a daughter who can't use two hands.

Sarah, the sermon was hard. Here is a couple that I remember: the best things in life take two hands. Like holding a baby. My daughter does not have use of both hands and can still hold a baby. She does not need two hands to dance. She dances. Also, she already embodies the message you were trying to give. She lives for connection with people and mostly uses technology to facilitate connections with other people. Yet, she was left out of your message today and she did not need to be.

Exclusion is easy and true inclusion is hard. Good intentions and good hearts must be met with a desire to seek education, to learn and to continuously work to include all people in everything the church does.

I believe Mayflower is a place that is capable of true inclusion.

I really have a great deal of empathy for the position that you, Howard, and Eli'jah are in. I suspect you get a lot of opinions from people on a pretty regular basis. So, I hate to find myself here being someone who is giving you a hard message. If I didn't care about Mayflower and if your messages did not matter to me, I would not take the time.

Sources

Garololi, Joe, "No phones allowed at Jack White's concert—and it was wonderful", SFChronicle.com, Aug 17, 2018.

Newport, Cal, "Steve Jobs Never Wanted Us to Use Our iPhones Like This", The New York Times, Jan. 25, 2019.

Sax, David, "Our Live Affair With Digital Is Over", The New York Times, Nov. 18, 2017.

Wells, Sam, "With Both Hands", sermon preached at Duke University Chapel, May, 2008.

"A Shooting Disturbingly Rooted in the Internet", New York Times, March 16, 2019.

Definition

Analog

Analog and Digital are intertwined these days. Digital information is represented by series of electronic **1s** and 0s, so that information is most current/modern but it is also **unreal** or fake. Analog information is represented in many ways—sight, touch, taste, smell, sound, etc.—and is, thus, **old fashioned** but it is also more real/accurate. Current usage is that Digital is modern/better and Analog is older/slower/less desirable.

*"You're going **analog** today, kids. Turn off the **screens** and take out some paper and **pens**," said the annoyed mother.*

#digital#old#slow#clock#binary#

