

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
East Moline, Illinois
Pastor Becky Sherwood
March 10, 2019, The 1st Sunday of Lent
Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Mark 1:36-39
SPACE FOR GOD: MAKING SPACE
A Sermon Series Based on Donald Postema's *Space for God*

Covenant

--Margaret Halaska

*God
knocks at my door
seeking a home for his son.*

Rent is cheap, I say.

I don't want to rent. I want to buy, says God.

*I'm not sure I want to sell,
but you might come in and look around.*

I think I will, says God.

I might let you have a room or two.

*I like it, says God. I'll take the two. You might decide to give me more some day.
I can wait, says God.*

*I'd like to give you more,
but it's a bit difficult. I need some space for me.*

I know, says God, but I'll wait. I like what I see.

*Hm, maybe I can let you have another room.
I really don't need that much.*

Thanks, says God, I'll take it. I like what I see.

*I'd like to give you the whole house
but I'm not sure ...*

*Think on it, says God. I wouldn't put you out.
Your house would be mine and my son would live in it.
You'd have more space than you'd ever had before.*

I don't understand at all.

*I know, says God, but I can't tell you about that.
You'll have to discover it for yourself.
That can only happen if you let me have the whole house.*

A bit risky, I say.

Yes, says God, but try me.

*I'm not sure –
I'll let you know.*

I can wait, says God, I like what I see.

--by Margaret Halaska ...O.S.F.

The God who knocks on each of our doors invites us on a journey. During this season of Lent we are going on a journey that invites us to make “space for God” in the midst of our busy, full lives. We will be guided by the book *Space For God*, by Donald Postema.

Lent is the season of the Christian year where we turn back to God as we prepare ourselves for Easter morning.

Lent asks us to pay attention and to take action in how we are living as followers of Jesus.

So, this year I've decided to let these Sundays of Lent be guided by an author who has helped guide my own journey of faith for over 20 years. The reason I've always liked Postema's writing is that he calls us to be ourselves as we come before God, and he calls us to be gentle with ourselves as we explore the life of faith, and make decisions about making more space for God in our lives.

During these next weeks we are going to let Donald Postema be our guide as we explore what it means to be people on a spiritual journey during Lent.

There are several things he says that I've always found helpful. The first is his own wisdom. He writes: “Our prayer lives should be as personal as our toothbrushes.” (Study Guide, p. 5) These sermons and ideas from Postema are meant to speak to each one of us wherever we are on the journey of faith.

You wouldn't want to use someone else's toothbrush, now would you?! So please let these weeks speak to your lives wherever you are right now!

One of the gifts of the life of faith is that God meets us where we are and guides us forward. God doesn't wait until we are smart and clever enough, religious and spiritual enough, devoted enough, or prayerful enough. God doesn't wait for our faith to look like anyone else's faith; not our pastors, our teachers, our parents or grandparents, or that person whose faith you admire. God meets each of us where we are, right now, today on our journeys of life and faith, and invites us to

walk closer with God.

As the opening poem says: “God likes what God sees” when God looks at each of us. And as Postema says: “Our prayer lives should be as personal as our toothbrushes.”

During these weeks Postema is going to invite us to make space for God in the midst of all that fills up our lives.

He invites us in with a quote from Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town*. Emily, a young woman in the play asks: “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?”

“In the play Emily dies in childbirth, but is granted a unique experience: The Stage Manager allows her to return from death and live one day of her life with her family. Although Emily has high hopes for that one day, she is disappointed. Just before she returns to her place in the cemetery, she reveals her frustration to the Stage Manager:

Emily: “We don’t have time to look at one another (She breaks down, sobbing.) I didn’t realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed...Do any human beings ever realize life while they live—every, every minute?”

Stage Manager: “No. (Pause) The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.
(p. 14)

Then Postema says we are called to be like the saints and poets and artists who look deeply at life. He quotes Vincent VanGogh who wrote that being an artist involves “grasping life in its depth.” And he goes on to say “Every person can be viewed as a special kind of artist; we are artists of our own lives. If we are to live with any authenticity, we must join those “saints and poets” who grasp life at its depth.”

He continues: “To live so deeply is a special challenge, for it is so easy to be superficial. We are so busy! We have so many urgent things to do, so many people to meet, so many books to read, so many events to attend. Either our jobs demand time and overtime, or we are unemployed and spend much of our time either looking for work or worrying about not finding it. Our families need lots of time and energy. Our studies could fill every working hour. Our houses or apartments or yards beg for our attention. We promise to do things for the church or for community organizations. Problems in many parts of the world concern us, and we are frustrated by not being able to do anything. We simply don’t have the time—our calendars are filled with appointments, doctors, dentists, music lessons, potlucks, concerts, sporting events, meetings...” (pp. 16-17)

Then Postema asks if, in the midst of all the busyness, we’ve ever stopped at the end of the day and sat still for a moment and wondered about the busyness of our lives and where we are going and what we are doing.

He offers these words from T.S. Elliot:
 “Endless invention, endless experiment,
 Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
 Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
 Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word...
 Where is the Life we have lost in living?
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” (p. 17)

If the busyness of life sounds familiar Postema invites us to turn to look at how Jesus lived his life. In the three years of his ministry he was constantly busy; he rarely had time to be alone. Jesus

was teaching, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, challenging the status quo, calling people over and over again to see the kingdom of God in their midst.

In the midst of all that busyness we also read about Jesus going away to quiet places to pray and to be with God. In the reading this morning Jesus had healed many who were sick, and then he went to a quiet place to be alone with God.

We see Jesus doing this after the feeding of the 5,000 and after he learns that John the Baptist has been murdered, and after times of overwhelming ministry.

Spending time alone with God was part of the rhythm of Jesus' life.

Postema writes: "If we are to be artists of our lives, we need to be in touch with the One who is "a greater artist than all other artists" (VanGogh)...The world needs people who will allow time for God to recreate them, play with them, touch them as an Artist who is making something beautiful with their lives."

And then he gives us a reminder that has helped me for years in my own journey of faith. We need to be gentle with ourselves as we make space for God. He says yes, making space for God takes discipline. It will ask something of us. He gives the example that he used to write into his calendar: 7 to 7:30 a.m. Prayer. Then he would often pass it up because it was just one more thing to do in a busy day. So, he changed what he put in his calendar to: 7:00 to 7:30 a.m. "God," and it was "a little harder to neglect."

Then he adds these helpful, needed words: "By all means be gentle with yourself. We get so down on ourselves when we attempt something and fail to do it or fail in doing it. We can do the same with prayer. We can get down on ourselves, think we are not 'doing as well as others,' punish ourselves, get more rigidly determined, and want to forget it all. Remember, prayer takes time and practice, so be gentle. And make whatever happens a part of your conversation with God." (p. 18-19)

Then he adds the quote that has helped me for years. He quotes Thomas Merton who said this: "We don't not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners, all our life." (p. 20)

What a relief, that we can be artists of our lives, content to be beginners, as we learn to make space in our busy lives for our God.

In this first week Postema invites us to begin to consider making space for God in our lives. In the weeks ahead he will give us practical ideas for how to do this.

He says to us: "We are God's work of art. We are being created and recreated by the saving touch of Christ, who, Van Gogh said, 'is more of an artist than the artists,' who working in living flesh and living spirit, made living people, instead of statues.

We too become artists as we come to know our Creator more intimately." (p 21)

He writes: "The world really doesn't need more busy people, maybe not even more intelligent people. It needs 'deep people,' people who know that they need solitude if they are going to find out who they are;

Silence, if their words are to mean anything;

Reflection, if their actions are to have any significance;

Contemplation, if they are to see the world as it really is;

Prayer if they are going to be conscious of God,

If they are to 'know God and enjoy God forever.'"

We end with words of prayer from Thomas Merton, who invites us to be beginners on this

journey. It calls us to recognize our need for God, as we start this Lenten Journey of making “space for God.”

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. (Leaders, p. 13-14)

Postema, Donald, *Space for God, The Study and Practice of Prayer and Spirituality, 2nd Edition*, Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1983, 1997, p. 7-32

Postema, Donald, *Space for God, Leader's Guide, The Study and Practice of Prayer and Spirituality, 2nd Edition*, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1983, p. 5-15