

Sunday, November 13, 2022

“Open-mouthed Tourist”

By Edgar F. Solís

Introduction:

What is getting your attention right now?

What is getting your attention at this very moment in your life?

We live in a time where many things are competing to get our attention. Duties, responsibilities, and concerns are in constant competition with distraction.

The entertainment industry has grown enormously, and its goal is precisely to get people's attention to provide rest, fun, and distraction from the reality of life.

Technology is a powerful element, and we need to consider all the positive aspects that technology has brought to people in different human activities such as health, transportation, and food production.

We also need to consider that technology has brought countless options to get distracted from what matters.

Look at this image.

What do you see there?

A family gathering.

All of them share the same space, but they seem absent, they are in the same place, but they are not together.

Where is their attention?

Context Matters:

In his reflection on today's Bible passage, Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries for the UMC Discipleship webpage, asks what you are distracted by?

That's a question underlying our text this week.

The Bible says that Jesus' disciples looked like open-mouthed tourists!

Have you traveled to places where everything is astounding?

If you had the opportunity to see your favorite place in the world, I am sure you would probably be amazed by the architecture, the beauty of the city, the wonderful landscapes, or the fantastic culture of the location.

Well, the temple in Jesus' time inspired awe as a monumental architectural feat, by its significance as the abode of God, and as the social, religious, and political center of the Jewish world.

The New Interpreters Study Bible says that Jesus had entered the temple to reclaim it, but the temple leadership rebuffed his efforts. Consequently, Jesus censures those of the Jerusalem elite who refuse to hold themselves accountable to God and who use their positions and the temple system itself to abuse, oppress, tyrannize people – mainly the vulnerable.”

Hence, Jesus' prediction of the utter annihilation of this corrupt system, along with the building, must have been stunning.

Theological Reflection:

Many people have mentioned how beautiful our church sanctuary is. Our church building has a long history of wonderful architectural design and work.

This dome, for instance.

According to our Church archives, this magnificent structure contains more than 1,250 square feet of glass.

The dome was made here in Des Moines in early 1900.

Forty feet in diameter, the design contains many symbols. Ben Allaway has identified some striking Celtic imagery in it. The two kinds of three-petaled flowers reflect the Trinity. All of creation is a vivid theme in Celtic spirituality. There are ocean waves and all the elements. Water, sunlight, wind, fire, flood, and light – all are important in the Celtic tradition.

Water and sunlight, and growing plants are strongly represented in our sanctuary's dome.

The red dot at the center could signify the Holy Spirit.

As you know, the distinctive Neo-Classical architecture of our church's sanctuary has a place in the national register of historic places.

As with many classic and neo-classic churches, the design responds to the purpose of producing a sense of reverence, admiration, reflection, and humbleness.

Hence, as long as all these elements work to connect our spirituality with the divine, the design and building serve its purpose.

However, many times we can run the risk of losing our attention and getting distracted, and here is where we need to connect with the Bible passage.

In other, and simple words, Jesus understood and proclaimed that all of the means that we use for God also have the purpose of serving people.

It doesn't matter how great or beautiful the temple in Jesus' times was. For him, every means of our religious expression must put God and people first, in order to serve God's mission in the world effectively.

“Make up your mind right now,” Jesus told his disciples. “The end is around the corner, and it will be unexpected, it could come at any moment! “

Like the disciples in our text, we can be distracted by what we see around us and lose sight of the fact that our reason for being is to live a life of purpose in God’s mission here on earth!

What is it that draws your attention away from your call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

Dr. Weber also says that *“While the distraction in our text is about something beautiful, even something of God—the temple itself—Jesus’s discourse tells us that sometimes it is terrible things that distract us. Wars and rebellions can distract us; false prophets or those who claim to represent Jesus but who really don’t, can distract us; natural disasters can distract us. All sorts of things can distract us from lifting the name of Jesus and living in hope and confidence that indeed God has the whole world in the divine hands.”*

If we will be open-mouthed tourist, we better play that role as we are admiring the powerful transformation of the world!

As we are actively participating with passionate hearts, willing souls and united hands in God’s Kingdom!

Amen!