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“Nearly Missed It!”

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John 20:19-31

Sometimes I wistfully consider all of the things I have missed while I was busy doing something else. All of the people and experiences that I did not take time for, because I was so preoccupied with my own little corner of the world. Certain things that seemed so important to me at the time, now seem utterly unnecessary and insignificant.

How much do we miss out on in life, because we are not paying attention?

I don't know who said it, but I believe it's true:

“Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans.”

There is a song from the Muppets called “Nearly Missed” which goes like this:

“While looking at my feet, at a crack in the sidewalk,  
an old tin can by the side of the road,  
I nearly missed a rainbow, I nearly missed a sunset,  
I nearly missed a shootin' star goin' by.

While studying a brand new hole in my sneakers,  
Finding a quarter and an old bus token.  
I nearly missed a rainbow, I nearly missed a sunset,  
I nearly missed a shootin' star goin' by.

Looking down at the ground means I know where I'm goin'  
no head up in the clouds to lead me astray,  
but I can't ever have dreams that way.  
I nearly missed a rainbow, I nearly missed a sunset,  
I nearly missed a shootin' star goin' by.  
Passin' me by. Goin' right by.”

On Easter, the Gospel writer Mark left us with some frightened women who were scared speechless after discovering that the body of Jesus was gone.

“While looking at their feet, at a crack in the sidewalk,  
an old tin can by the side of the road, they nearly missed a rainbow,  
nearly missed a sunset, nearly missed a shootin' star goin' by.”

So ends Mark's unfinished story of the resurrection, with a near miss.

But John expands that story in today's lesson, telling us more about what happened after the resurrection.

John tells that many friends of Jesus, not just the 11 remaining disciples, but many more--both Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, have gathered in a house in Jerusalem.

They are terrified and in hiding.

The authorities are in Jerusalem, also, and increasingly convinced that this hero worship of Jesus Christ must end. They cannot have his followers displaying more loyalty to him than to them and to Rome.

They consider them a dangerous threat to their power.

Because of this, everyone is scared. They lock the door to the house and hide out in fear.

And that is exactly how they almost miss Jesus.

They were studying a hole in their shoes, looking down at the ground, They nearly miss a rainbow, nearly miss a shooting star, nearly miss a Risen Lord.

Jesus walks through the locked door, stands among them and says,  
"Peace be with you."

They cannot believe it, wondering if they are hallucinating, seeing a ghost. It is not until he shows them the scars on his hands and feet that they believe, with the exception of Thomas, who has to touch Jesus for himself a week later.

They very nearly missed him.

They very nearly missed the significance of Jesus rising from the grave.

How frequently does fear, worry, anxiety, or self-absorption cause us to miss experiences that have the power to change our lives?

How often have we missed out on relationships which could deepen, comfort and help us?

I now know what I would have missed had I not gone to Guatemala with 9 other people from our church, 5 from Wheat Ridge UMC and 1 from Delta UMC.

I would have missed seeing God at work in some powerful, touching ways.

There were so many good reasons for me not to go.

Guatemala has crime, an unstable political situation, and we would all be exposed to illnesses, primitive conditions, and the trip was expensive.

I knew I would be gone for some important church meetings, and I would not be able to see my daughter go to prom. There were good reasons for me not to go. But oh, what I would have missed! My life was forever changed by this experience

Those gentle, beautiful people with their simple lives,  
the historic and diverse geography, the open air markets, the churches,  
the animals, the smells, sights and sounds will remain in my heart forever.

I would have missed the children at the orphanage in Lemoa,  
and leading Vacation Bible School at the public school in Lemoa,  
and at the John Wesley School in Santa Cruz.

I would have missed meeting incredible people whose life's work is improving the  
condition of the poorest of the poor in Guatemala.

And I would have missed growing so much closer to the members of our Team,  
some of whom got robbed and some of whom got sick, but they didn't complain.

Next Sunday we will tell you all about our work there,  
and as an added bonus we are hosting a Guatemalan  
market where you can purchase beautiful handcrafted items for sale.

Of course we cannot all go off on a Mission Trip like this one.  
Nevertheless, we can and we must place ourselves in the paths of those people and  
experiences that teach us, stretch us, and allow us to help the forgotten and  
forsaken. We have to continually look for ways to broaden our understanding,  
constantly expanding our circle of concern.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we cannot afford to miss those experiences  
which will stretch us and take us out of our comfort zones.  
Sometimes I am convinced that the worst sin of Christianity in America is that we  
are too comfortable, too complacent, too content.

And that clearly is not the life to which Jesus has called us.  
He calls us to be salt and light, to stretch ourselves, to become uncomfortable so  
that we might heal this sad and weary world.  
He calls us not to miss the powerless, the seemingly unimportant and insignificant  
things and people of this world. To make disciples and make a difference.

Our church has been presented with an incredible opportunity to do just that.  
After 125 years of Christian service, we have been given a chance to re-create  
ourselves once again, as we have done so many times in our past.

We now have a chance to make disciples for many, many years to come.  
I believe God is guiding us into a very exciting and promising future,  
allowing us to do so much more than we ever dreamed possible.

It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to be a part of the resurrection of a church!  
But some folks have already decided to miss it.

Some have already made the decision to join another church once we relocate. While I find that sad and disappointing, we will of course give those people our blessing if this is what they are led to do. But if you are planning to leave, please do not pick another church just because it is comfortable, convenient, or easy. Pick a church because it stretches you while it blesses you, a church that inspires you, and takes you far beyond your comfort zones.

Being a Christian is not something that makes life easier. The path of Jesus is a challenging and difficult one, a path that should mold us into better people who will not miss an opportunity to change the world.

How often do we miss out on things in this life because we are indifferent or tired, or because, like the followers of Jesus after his death, we are afraid? We are afraid of losing what we know, our jobs, spouses, friends or health. We are afraid of our loneliness, afraid for our children, afraid of the future. And when we look down and focus upon our fear, we miss so much. Sadly enough, in our world there is so very much to fear right now.

T.S. Eliot said in The Wasteland that "April is the cruelest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land." As you all know, on April 16<sup>th</sup>, just days before the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbine, Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia was the site of the deadliest shooting rampage in modern American history. 33 dead, 15 injured, and a world in complete shock. How can we ever comprehend and accept such a thing? We cannot. It is beyond comprehension.

There's a scene from the Oscar-nominated film "Blood Diamond" that is haunting. The movie is set in 1999 Sierra Leone while a civil war rages fueled by conflict diamonds being sold to pay for weapons. Leonardo DeCaprio plays the anti-hero, a mercenary with something of a conscience, who is hunting for a huge pink diamond. The Revolutionary United Front meanwhile, is leveling entire villages, chopping of the hands of some so they can't vote in elections, and snatching young boys to become soldiers in the rebel army.

In a quiet moment of reflection while mayhem explodes around them, Danny Archer chats with a journalist, and reveals that his mother was raped and shot and his father was decapitated. He says:

“ Sometimes I wonder will God ever forgive us for what we've done to each other? Then I look around and I realize. God left this place a long time ago.”

When events like the carnage in Virginia happen, it shatters our peace,  
it intrudes upon our consciousness,  
and we cannot help but wonder if indeed God hasn't left this place a long time ago.  
If God has simply left us to ourselves and the result is the chaos and cruelty  
we observe all around us, all the time.

Although the human state of affairs appears hopeless in the light of such tragedies,  
I remain convinced that events like what happened in Virginia have nothing to do  
with God, in fact they completely break God's heart.

Any act of violence, pure evil, or darkness is totally contrary to the will of God.  
Blaming God or questioning God is fruitless.

Instead, we should ask what could we do to help implement God's will,  
which is always for the good and growth of humankind.  
What can we do to make prevent things like this from ever happening again?  
What can we do to heal, and help, and bless those heart-broken people?  
How can we reach out to the lost and alienated with understanding and love?

Christ continually calls us to move us beyond our comfort zones.  
One of the churches in our Rocky Mountain Conference did just that.  
Some of the members at First UMC in Salt Lake City, Utah, decided to do  
something in the aftermath of the shootings in Virginia.  
They decided to focus upon the family of shooter Cho Seung-Hui living in Salt  
Lake.

They took up an offering to give to his family, knowing that family would be  
shunned and despised by just about everyone else in Salt Lake.  
These Methodists tried to imagine how it would feel to be his parent or sibling,  
to live with the knowledge of his horrifying rampage and suicide,  
to wonder if there was anything you could have done to prevent it.  
When a church member contacted Cho's family to let them know of the gift they  
invited them into her home, for coffee and dessert.

It was very small and quiet gathering.

The heartbroken mother and father came, along with their 3 daughters.  
Two church members were present along with the pastor his spouse and their  
children. The pastor commented on how easily all of the children present

connected and played together.

They ate, they prayed, they cried, and for that moment in time

God's love was made visible.

It was a beautiful response that bespoke compassion, forgiveness, and  
understanding.

That is the body of Christ—never missing chance to help and heal.

My friends, we are in the glorious season of Eastertide,

a season which reminds us God has not left us at all.

God has left the tomb, however, and that is good news.

God is with us today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

So don't be staring at your feet,

at a crack in the sidewalk, an old tin can by the side of the road.

Look up, so that you cannot miss our good and gracious God.