

"Putting It On Cruise Control"

Amos 6:1-7; I Timothy 6:6-19

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

August 24, 2014 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald Botts

After service a woman said to her pastor, "I wanted your advice on something, but when I phoned you at the church yesterday you weren't here."

"I'm sorry," said the minister, "but yesterday was my day off."

The parishioner retorted, "A day off? You know the devil never takes a day off."

Smiling he replied, "But that's just the point. If I didn't have a day off I'd be just like him!"

Well, I have to admit that I took a whole ten days off for a vacation, but I feel a lot better for it. Now it's great to get back.

So maybe that's a little bit of an exaggeration. After all it's not too hard to endure sitting on the deck of a beach house, a nice sea breeze blowing in, feet up on the rail, a cold drink in your hand, and looking out at the rolling ocean without a care for the moment. Let just say that if I can't stay there, then this is where I'd rather be. What **is** true is that I missed all of you.

It's a long way to Oak Island, North Carolina. Just about 700 miles. Fortunately the route is mostly freeway, which makes the time shorter and the driving easier. Once you get outside the major cities you simply set the car on cruise control and then all you have to do is steer it. This may not be automatic pilot, but it sure makes travelling less stressful.

Most people probably put their control setting on the maximum speed limit, or a little over. I don't suppose anyone ever sets it for the minimum allowed. First of all, you'd probably be run over by the rest of the traffic and it would take almost double the time to get to your destination.

Actually, the best setting for your particular car may not be the legal limit. Its true cruising speed is where it operates at its greatest efficiency, considering the car's mechanics and road conditions. There was a time when many states had no posted speed limits, and it was up to the driver to determine how fast to go and where the auto worked best. There is an optimal point for every vehicle, and that holds true for boats and airplanes and every other type of craft.

We humans also have our cruising speed. It's the pace of life at which we operate most effectively. As with an engine, it is somewhere between idle and open throttle. If we barely get out of neutral most of our life then it's unlikely we'll accomplish much. Conversely, if we go full bore all the time we may blow up or burn out before our time. One of the guiding principles of life is to determine your personal cruising speed and to operate at that level most of the time.

Our two scripture readings both touch on this thought today. From our Old Testament Amos chides the people who idle through life, who—in his words—“...lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches...who sing songs...drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils.”

Amos' message comes from a period of great prosperity in Israel, at least for the most fortunate. His words are especially directed toward those who exhibit self-satisfied complacency while the religious and moral life of the country is rotting away from the inside.

Because economic conditions were relatively good, those who should be providing proper leadership have instead turned to a life of ease and debauchery. Rather than taking full advantage of such favorable conditions, they concentrate on their own pleasures. They even assume that their prosperity is evidence of God's approval. Amos, however, foresees a rude awakening where everything they have now will be lost in time. Their pretense of religious practice will not be enough to head off the terrible destruction coming their way.

There are people today who likewise enjoy the benefits that come through the labor of others, but are unwilling to put anything back into life for the good of all. They use but do not produce. Were Amos to have been born in our day, he might look at the practices of many and point out this wrong. He would, no doubt, be least sympathetic to those who claim to be people of faith, but who don't show it by what they do. This kind of Christian sets their cruising speed at about ten miles an hour, or worse, pulls off the road altogether.

Turning to our other text, the letter of Paul to Timothy, here an older pastor addresses concerns to a younger colleague. He cites the high speed, almost frantic pace of many, to do more and acquire more. He says, "Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For their love of money is a root of kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wondered away from the faith ... "

Here is the opposite of the idle rich. Here are those who throw aside the more important things in life to put all their energy into pursuing money. Acquiring more is their primary goal. They become addicted and cannot stop. They put their cruise control on 90 and never let up. Speed and forward progress is all they know, and often they won't be content even should they achieve their objective.

Some of us are like that, too. We're so busy trying to get where we're going that we never stop to question whether it is a worthy destination. We're likely to fall into the trap of practicing our faith in a hit-and-miss way. A little bit of effort here, a little bit there, but scattered and without focus. We simply don't have time to really consider what we do and how we do it. We're going too fast otherwise to see the road signs.

In this epistle Paul directs us to find contentment not in the "uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides everything for our enjoyment." We are to "do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share " thus finding the "life that really is life."

Taken as a whole, the Bible teaches us that balance in living is most important: not too much of something, nor too little of it either. All prayer and no action is overloaded in one direction, while all action and no prayer tips us the other way. We need to find just the right balance

point for us where we are at our optimal best. We can look to others for guidance but, in the end, we have to make that discovery for ourselves. No one is exactly like us, so no one can accurately tell us what speed is best for us.

God calls us to find our true selves through living an unselfish and caring life, one that is neither too slow nor too fast, neither too active nor too contemplative, one that has a sense of urgency but not a frantic pace. It must regard both our needs and those of others. When you find that point, then set your cruise control accordingly and be ready to make the most of every day.