



SUNDAY SERMON

## 15 Seconds

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Holy one, whose birth brings light and life to all. Give us the wisdom to treasure your words in our heart today and every day. Amen.

Merry Christmas! Today marks the mid-way point of this year's Christmas season. While the leftovers may be dwindling down to nothing and the tree may be looking a little sad after a month in the stand, let me assure you there is still much joy and hope to be unwrapped this Christmas. In fact Joy and hope are always at our fingertips - but this requires something of us. This requires gratitude, awareness and believe it or not our undivided attention for at least 15 seconds.

15 seconds? What are you talking about Amy? Friends, I myself have not had a very high view of 15 second intervals until one fateful day. Two summers ago, I happened to be 7 months pregnant in the midst of an unusually oppressive heat wave in the Bay Area visiting my in laws. Unbeknownst to me, it is uncommon for folks in the Bay Area to have air conditioners because the temperatures are relatively mild and it never stays too hot for too long. All that is a lie – Every single day I was there I woke up sweating, I went to sleep sweating. There was no relief - except for every time John and I went somewhere in our air-conditioned rental car. I have never been so grateful for the air conditioning feature in today's cars. So, this one day we're driving to get falafels and to keep me cool in every sense of that word. We turn on a podcast where Richard Rohr is the guest for this episode. In usual fashion, Father Rohr blows me away and teaches me that a life full of joy and gratitude is riding on 15 seconds of time. 15 seconds - that's the time it takes to savor an enjoyable, beautiful moment. But before I get too far ahead of myself let's return to the podcast.

The episode starts with an acknowledgment that the great reformer Martin Luther was not a mystic. Particularly near the end of his life when he was just too consumed with anger and bitterness. He had lots of justifiable reasons to be angry - the Church treated him horribly. Instead of appreciating or acknowledging his contributions he was maligned and discarded as a crazy, heretic. And Luther was unable to return to his contemplative mystical roots because the anger took a hold and festered in his mind. Once that happened a life of wonder and mysticism was out of the question. And friends, that's not a metaphor - that's science.

It turns out our brains are not capable of being angry and contemplative at the same time. Then the news got even more hard to hear - while you and I may be more attracted to a life full of positivity - our brains have evolved in such a way

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Christmas 1  
Sunday, Dec. 30, 2018

PREACHER

The Rev. Amy Molina-  
Moore

that they are more inclined to dwell on negative, angry emotions. Richard Rohr continues on in this podcast to tell us how he came to learn this. He was leading one of his retreats when he learned from a neuroscientist student that scientists “can now prove fearful, hateful, negative thoughts are like Velcro - the neurons just grab around them and solidify [while] positive, grateful, loving thoughts are like Teflon. They just slide off ....” At this point in the podcast I’m feeling really disappointed and almost offended that this is the good news of this so-called Christian podcast. Luckily I think those negative thoughts for less than a split second because in the next breath Father Rohr offers the antidote to the faulty wiring in our human brains.

So while negative thoughts are sticky like Velcro; “and positive, grateful, loving thoughts are like Teflon - they slide right off ...that is unless you savor them consciously. Unless you savor them consciously for at least 15 seconds.” Friends, this is great news this morning. Negative thoughts will arise but they don’t have to rule the day. You and I can treasure and savor moments of light and beauty by choosing to be more present and giving ourselves 15 seconds to honor the moments of goodness and beauty in our life. If you want an example of what this looks like in practice, then sisters and brothers, I suggest that you look no further than our dear sister Mary.

In the Gospel passage, we just read the concluding portion of Luke chapter 2 and in it we learn that after a wild experience of parenting the Son of God, Mary’s posture was to stay present and take it all in. Luke tells us “His mother treasured all these things in her heart.” Rather than being an off-hand, nice sounding remark, this is actually a refrain that appears throughout this chapter. After the shepherds arrive to see the Christ Child they share with Mary all the wonderful things the angel said, and Mary’s response is pretty much the same. “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

In Mary’s response we get an ancient example of living the kind of life that Father Rohr is talking about. A life where one practices savoring and treasuring life-giving moments full of beauty, truth and love. Mary knew intuitively that good things deserve to be treasured. This is all the more profound considering the challenges Jesus’ mother faced. Mary’s life was not easy, or perfect or magical. Hers was a hard, challenging, oppressed existence which makes this lesson even more powerful. Sure, it is important to savor the beautiful moments that arise when things are beautiful and pretty easy to appreciate. Savoring a beautiful sunrise and treasuring music that moves you to tears is a beautiful gift from God. But Mary’s example urges us to go deeper. Mary’s posture teaches us that even in the midst of confusing, challenging, downright hard experiences, there are moments that deserve to be honored, moments to be grateful for, moments that need to be recognized as good or they’ll just slip away...”

While the glow of Christmas is still around us, the reality is that 2018 has not been an ideal year by any stretch of the imagination for most of us. Many of us can’t wrap our minds around a society that each day seems to grow further apart. We weep for those refugees and migrants all over the world looking for safety and security. Collectively we’re just exhausted from this year politically, socially, environmentally, even personally. This year there are those of us who’ve lost jobs, homes, dreams, even loved ones. AND YET - even still, each and everyone of us has had an experience that deserved 15 seconds of savoring.

I do not know what 2019 will bring. Perhaps 2019 will go easy on us, but maybe not. Either way you and I will experience moments of beauty, of holy, of God’s light piercing the darkness. And

when those moments arise be like Mother Mary. Take 15 seconds and treasure the moments in your heart. Assume a posture of gratitude, and savor God's goodness. In fact let's practice it now. The world may be raging outside, and maybe your heart is raging inside. But trust me in this moment - surrounded in a place of prayer, with those who wish you peace, this is an ok moment. This is even a good moment. I'm going to set my alarm for 15 seconds. Ready. Set. Treasure. (Set alarm.) Amen.