

A WORD FROM REV. HINMAN

God in Focus

The season of Lent is a season of preparation. Between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, we are called to undertake a period of self-examination, reflection, repentance, and re-focusing. In worship, I have been preaching a series of sermons I'm calling "Busy" – looking at the ways in which the busyness of our lives calls us away from a focus on the love and grace of our unhurried God.

I have to admit, though, that it's sometimes hard to distinguish my Lenten days from my non-Lenten days. Although I have tried to follow my own advice, it's easy for my focus to get pulled away from God and on to the more mundane aspects of to-do lists, schedules, calendars, and plans. I need reminders!

That is one of the reasons that I have enjoyed taking part in the Photo-A-Day discipline from ReThink Church – a program of the United Methodist Church. Each day you are given a word and each day you take or share a photo that represents that word in some way. This may not seem like your typical Lenten discipline, but it has encouraged me to take some time each day to focus on seeing God somewhere in the world that I may not have before.

An added challenge for me has been that the camera on my phone has apparently lost its ability to focus (is there a metaphor in here, somewhere?), so I either have to figure out how to perfectly place the camera to get the picture I want, or find a picture elsewhere – in the depths of my phone's memory, from another source, etc. I have to keep my eyes open to find "sacrifice" or "treasure" or "celebrate" in the world around me, or find them represented in photos I took for a completely different reason.

It's a new way of looking at the world – through the lens of a particular word or idea. Having a particular focus for the day encourages me to see things in a different and maybe even deeper way than I may have before. I see "preserve" where I previously just saw a covered bridge. I see "celebrate" where I just saw some random flowers in the yard.

One of my favorite books is *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal. I actually used a passage from that book as my photo for the word "go". Elsewhere in the book, she is talking about randomly declaring a particular week, the Week of the Marshmallow. After she has made this determination, marshmallows or references to marshmallows begin popping up in different places in her life.

She writes, "Did I somehow will these marshmallow events to occur? Or did I just notice (and otherwise would not have) what would have occurred regardless?... Back when Jason and I were crafting bracelets out of antique buttons, I was always finding cool buttons on the sidewalk. *Such a beautiful button, just lying there, I can't wait to show J...* But aha, once we stopped making bracelets, the sidewalk in turn stopped presenting me with these stray gems; I don't think I've found a roadside button since. Evidently, if you put yourself on high marshmallow alert, high button alert, high injustice alert, high whatever alert, the world will gladly accommodate you."

Maybe this photo-a-day discipline is just putting me on high "faith" alert, high "beloved" alert, high "rest" alert. But I have appreciated the ways that I am seeing these things appear in my life and in my pictures. They help remind me that we can experience God in all sorts of places and in all sorts of ways. Where will I see "open" today? Where will I see "wise"? Where will I see "blessed"? Where will I see God?

You can see all the photos I've posted so far (and even add your own!) on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/cpfirstumc/>.

