

Our brains are incredible organs. There are things it can do that are mindboggling.

- It can calculate $4 + 8$ and the square root of 9.
- It can create a sculpture or compose music.
- Our brains tell our toes to wiggle and make sense of words on a page.
- Our brains are even capable of making a shopping list at the same time as we are reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

I remember a time when my son David was very young. He wanted *Good Night Moon* read over and over again and he would know if I skipped a single page.

But he wasn't prepared for the time I said "Goodnight cow jumping over the cheese".

The book has the cow jumping over the moon,

but my wonderful multi-tasking brain, reciting the story, was thinking about the Laughing cow cheese I wanted to put on my shopping list.

Multi-tasking can be helpful, even essential in some instances.

But most people would say that it is most effective for the brain to focus on one thing at a time.

It made a difference to David that my brain be completely focused on the story at hand – for one does not say goodnight to a bowl full of yogurt, either!

We may be able to get away with being distracted occasionally, but if we cannot focus on a task or a person, something important is lost.

In relationships especially, it is essential to be fully present

– fully engaged – with others.

No relationship is more important – more far-reaching

– than our relationship with God through the Savior, Jesus.

Jesus is very much interested in where our brains are when we meet with him.

He knows that religious people like you and me are easily distracted.

He knows that we are vulnerable to one of Satan's deadliest strategies:

- Getting us to believe that if we *appear* to be doing the right thing,
 - it is true that we *are*, in fact, doing the right thing.
- Or putting it another way,
- getting us to believe that if we *say* the right words it is the same as *meaning* them.
- Both are lies by which our own hearts are deceived.

Jesus himself calls us out, repeating God's warning in Isaiah 29: 13

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is not in it. They think I am concerned with rules that humans have devised and disregard my own Word to them.

To be clear – I too am a sinner, a hypocrite, and a flawed human being.

Jesus is calling me out with the rest of the religious people.

This is a mirror I don't like looking into,

- because I know how easy it is to just do things by rote,

- without really letting God's Word sink into my heart and mind.
- I know how easy it is for me to skim the surface
 - going through the motions of being religious
 - but not really paying much attention to what I am doing or
 - – more importantly – what God is doing.

So this exhortation of Jesus is a wake-up call.

And the fact that James hammered on it in the earliest church is further proof of its importance.

The Message renders it this way:

22-24 Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear!

26-27 Anyone who sets himself up as "religious" by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

Our relationship with Jesus demands our focused attention and inquiring hearts and minds

- so that we experience God as Jesus reveals him
- and our lives reflect the changes he makes in us.

No one should ever leave worship the same as when arriving,

- **since Jesus welcomes us as those dead in our sins**

- **and by the sharing of his own lifeblood with us,**
- **raises us from the dead!**

And having raised you from the dead,

- **he sends you out, forgiven and free,**
- **to share his life with the world.**

...

Are you with me? Stay focused.

There are several important principles to remember:

1. When God speaks to us, our brains need to be focused on what God is saying.

- a. Worship is God's conversation with us.
 - i. The words we sing and say are both God's words to us and our words to God.
 - ii. The scriptures and sermon are God in conversation with us through the Holy Spirit
 - iii. The prayers and hymns are our participation in this holy conversation.
 - iv. So it is important to pay attention to the words and not just repeat them by rote.
 1. Consider their meaning
 2. Think of them as pertaining to you and your life, your problems, your hopes and joys
 3. If you don't understand something, ask about it

2. Put your heart into what is being said and sung

a. It comes from God and is directed to God!

- i. With apologies to JFK: Ask not what you can get out of worship but what you can put into it.

- ii. Do you come to worship with an attitude of holy reverence for God who is present?
- iii. Do you come expecting God to speak to you and make a difference in your life?
- iv. Do you come expecting to share the joy of the Lord that was given to you in baptism?
- v. Do you come expecting to be surprised by God?
- vi. Or do you come with human expectations of how you will feel or what should happen?
- vii. Are you deceived into thinking it is doing a great thing just by going through the motions?

Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring the church's worship – why we do what we do and what it means.

Sometimes it seems like stepping into a foreign country where we don't know the language.

But truly, each week, in Jesus Christ,

God is inviting us and drawing us into a holy conversation of love.

And it matters that our hearts and brains are in it.

For God sends us out from this conversation into the world where there are homeless to be sheltered and loveless to be befriended.

God sends us out into the world where the only way to know what is true is to know what God says.

And we know what God says by the Word of the Bible preached into our hearts and brains by the Holy Spirit.

My words are of no use except that the Holy Spirit uses them to make God's will known to you.

And that is true of all the words of our worship service.

They are the content of God's holy conversation with us.

So let's focus our attention – put our hearts into whatever we are singing, saying, hearing and doing.

For we are the people whom Jesus raises from the dead!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Check out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7xslMCSG_M

And <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuYoVjp33zk>

And <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gbmVW7u0rw>