JUST WAIT:  
DON’T JUST DO SOMETHING, STAND THERE  
DECEMBER 21, 2014

The 1935 comedy “A Night at the Opera” starred the Marx brothers, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo. Groucho plays the character Driftwood and says of a contract being considered,  
“It’s all right. That’s in every contract.  
That’s what they call a sanity clause.”

Chico, playing the character Fiorello, snaps back,  
“You can’t fool me.  
There ain’t no Sanity Claus.”

Maybe Chico was right.  
There ain’t no “sanity clause” to this time of year.  
Advent is crazy with contradictions.

Contradictions like  
Hurry and get all this stuff done,  
but slow down and enjoy this season.  
Buy tons and tons of stuff no one really needs,  
and come worship the one born into poverty.  
Hang lights and ornaments, more and bigger and better,  
to outshine the neighbors and win the neighborhood competition,  
but bow before the lowly manger in a stable.

Santa! Santa! Santa!  
But remember, it’s all about Jesus.

Isn’t it a just a little crazy?  
Maybe there ain’t no “sanity clause” for the season.

It’s December 21, and we’ve all been running at an insanely high speed toward the big day.  
And some of you may be a bit fatigued.

So today I’m going to give you a word from God that might sound pretty good right about now.  
Don’t just do something; Stand there.  
I know; usually we say it the other way around:  
Don’t just stand there; do something.  
But the word today intentionally turns that upside down.  
Don’t just do something; stand there.  
Just wait.  
Just wait on God.  
Just wait.

Sounds like a relief, right?  
But it doesn’t always come across that way.  
I know people who are very hesitant to take a vacation.  
“I’ve got so much to do, so many things on my desk, calls to make, people to see, things to do.  
How can I possibly leave?”

I can get into that mode myself.  
And for the first couple of days away,  
a vacation, a few days off at Christmas, or just an extra day here or there,  
and I can catch myself checking my work email.

But I also know when I do that God looks down and says,  
“Really?”
You think you’re that important?
You think you’re indispensable?
You think the roof will fall in if you’re not there?”

We’re so busy doing all the time,
it may be that we’re not sure who we are if we’re NOT doing something.
We’ve turned into human DOINGS rather than human BEINGS.
We really do begin to think it all depends on us and our activity.

To add to the insanity,
some of that nonstop busyness is self-inflicted.
Oh, I know we like to blame the boss for it.
And sometimes we even like to brag about it.
Because, of course, it makes me look essential, important.
Being “holier than thou” is pretty rare these days.
But we love to appear “busier than thou.”

So today I deliver the word from God to you and to me:
Don’t just do something; Stand there.
Just wait.
Just wait on God.
Just wait.

Actually, the Bible says it several different ways.
One of them may sound familiar, yet is too often forgotten.
It’s found in the Ten Commandments.

EXODUS 20:8-11
The Sabbath day.
Keep it holy.
Not just “go to worship.”
Do not do any work, and don’t make anyone else work.
Because even God took a break.
And you are not more important than God.
So take a cue from him.
Rest.
Don’t just do something; stand there.

Did you ever consider that,
when you over-function and never take a break,
you are breaking one of the Big Ten?
God commands that we take a break from our busyness.
It is a way of following his example.
It is a way of reflecting his image,
the image in which we were created.
And it is a matter of simple obedience.

When the Ten Commandments are restated in Deuteronomy it says,
“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt
and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.
Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” (Dt.5:15)
The Israelites were reminded that, once upon a time, they were slaves, owned by Egypt and Pharaoh.
And there is no day off for slaves.
If all you do is work, work, work,
you are once again a slave…. to your work.
God does not want you owned by anyone but Him.
You are to belong wholly and completely to God.
So Paul wrote to the church in Corinth,

"You were bought with a price;
do not become slaves of human masters."

(1Cor.7:23)

Do not be a slave to anyone or anything else.
You were bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus,
and now you belong wholly and completely to God.

So, in the midst of your frantic activity,
working here and there, accomplishing this or that,
take a break.
Don’t just do something; stand there.

Those two expressions of the Sabbath law give two reasons for us to observe a real rest.

First, because God rested,
and we’re supposed to reflect the character of God.
Our lives are supposed to reflect the character of God.

And second, because we are not supposed to be slaves to our work,
nor to anything or anyone else,
except to God.
Our lives are supposed to belong wholly and completely to God.

I’d like to suggest a third reason for the importance of real rest.

I base it on another scripture verse, this one from the Psalms, Psalm 46:10:

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

(Ps.46:10a)

So long as we’re busy going, busy doing, busy accomplishing, busy, busy, busy,
it’s all about us.

It sort of fits with the old American ideal of “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps,”
and being a “self-made man.”

Now, clearly there’s a lot be said for hard work and accomplishment.
But there comes a point where it can be unhealthy.

It can be physically unhealthy,
because the body is never rested,
but is pushed beyond its intended capacity.

It can be mentally and emotionally unhealthy,
as the mind never gets a rest,
and the heart is never fed and rejuvenated.

It can be relationally unhealthy,
when relationships are neglected in favor of accomplishing more,
family and friends go by the wayside,
children and spouses feel neglected.

It can be spiritually unhealthy.
Because it’s all about me and what I am doing,
and there’s no room for God.

God says,

“Be still and know that I am God.”

Be still, stop doing, just BE,
and discover the world will still spin on its axis
without your help!

Be still, take a day away,
and find out your workplace will not collapse without you.
you’re not as important as you think you are.
God is God, and you’re not him.

Personal confession:

Early in my ministry I was hesitant to take time away from the church. 
I was the pastor, after all.
And the work of the church is really important.
I was at every meeting, every event, every hospital and every home.
It’s GOD’S work, you know.
Boy, that’s a killer rationale.
I was the classic workaholic pastor.
And as the church grew, my busyness grew, my time off shrank,
and my time at home shriveled to almost nothing.
Even my time in personal Bible reading and prayer suffered.
Oh, I studied the Bible,
but always for a sermon or Bible study,
rarely just to feed me.

Until I found myself empty,
emotionally empty, spiritually empty, fatigued,
and no longer as close to Jill and the kids.

That was the beginning of a radical reorganization
of my life and ministry.
I rediscovered I am not “the minister.”
We are all ministers
with God-given abilities to put to kingdom work.
I need to step back and
let others use their abilities in ministry.
God made abundantly clear that, among other things,
I MUST take time to “Be still and know that HE is God.”
Not me, but HE is God.

The entire verse reads like this,
“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” (Ps.46:10)

When we are still,
when we halt our frantic activity for a period of time,
and we see that life goes on,
that it’s NOT all dependent on ME,
then God is exalted.

We recognize that HE is God.
HE’S the one in charge.
HE’S the one who makes it all work.

So in this busy season of Advent preparations for Christmas:
Don’t just do something; stand there.
Learn that God is God,
and you’re not him.
At first it’s powerfully humbling.
Once you try it enough to get used to it,
it’s wonderfully freeing.
I can take a vacation and not be constantly worrying about the church.
When I’m not here,
God is still God,
you’re still the church,
and the ministry still goes on!
And I can relax, really rest.

There is yet a fourth and related reason to say,
“Don’t just do something; stand there.”
It, too, comes from the Psalms, Psalm 40:1:
“I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.”
(Ps.40:1)

If we’re always busy doing,

if we never pause from our activity and efforts,

we might not leave room for God to do what God wants to do.

In the Old Testament there is the story of a couple named Abraham and Sarah.

They’d been married many years, but were childless.

And in that day and time,

childlessness was considered a sign of God’s disfavor.

God promised them a child, a son.

They laughed at the idea because they were waaay over the hill.

“Imagine us having a baby!

We’ll be the only couple going down that aisle of the grocery store

buying Pampers AND Depends!”

But God got their hopes up.

They did their part, and waited… and waited… and waited.

No baby.

Finally, tired of waiting, old Sarah told Abraham,

“Take my young slave girl Hagar and have a child with her.

Since Hagar belongs to me, her child will belong to me, too.”

Abraham looked at his elderly wife, looked at young Hagar, and said,

“Well…. OK.”

Hagar became pregnant.

Enter envy, jealousy, strife.

Hagar began to despise Sarah,

and Sarah blamed Abraham.

(Ge.16)

FIVE chapters later, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son,

the son promised them by God.

And the envy, jealousy, and strife intensified,

now two mothers and two sons.

(Ge.21)

The two sons of Abraham gave rise to two nations of people

who were at odds with each other throughout history.

In fact, to this day the Jewish people understand themselves to be
descendants of Sarah’s son Isaac,

while the Arab Muslim people believe themselves to be
descendants of the other son, Ishmael.

Still sworn enemies, at odds with one another.

All because Sarah and then Abraham grew tired of waiting on God

and decided to make things happen their way.

On the other hand, if we learn to “just wait,”

if we’ll heed the warning to

“Don’t just do something; stand there,”

we may have opportunity to see our God do some wonderful things.

Like an old man named Simeon and an old woman named Anna,
two individuals also looking for a baby from God. We usually hear their story right after Christmas. But their story is relevant to our theme today.

LUKE 2:25-38
They waited.
   They worshiped and fasted and prayed, and they waited.
   And one day they saw God.
As we move toward the conclusion of this season of frantic busyness…
   Take a moment here and there to answer God’s call:
   Don’t just do something; stand there.
   And may you, too, see God.

SERMON NOTES:

Busyness

Don’t just do something; stand there.

Reasons to rest, be still

   Exodus 20:8-11

   Deuteronomy 5:15

   Psalm 46:10

   Psalm 40:1

   Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 16; 21)

   Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38)