Hurry, a Harrowing Hell

By Andrew Goins
Watauga County

A hurried person is a reductionist person; a cynic unable to step back from the world in which they live. Their world is inhabited by hurry, consumed by chaos, and spiraling down into the deep abyss of meaninglessness. The unhurried person is a mystic. A poet. The one who sees a bush that is not just a bush but a burning bush; a place where they can encounter God.

Hurry reduces the world to a godless world. It is an embodied doctrine of deism. God the clockmaker makes the clock of creation so that it ticks and toc's death and decay as time marches on. Creation abandoned by its Creator. Rwanda, Hitler, and John Wayne Gacy, Junior make a convincing apologetic. And so the logic goes, if creation is abandoned, then creatures are abandoned. So we hurry. We are trapped in a harrowing hell of life on our own terms trapped in the sickening cycle of low-grade anxiety and paralyzing fear. We grope in the dark for dominion and dominance. We prowl and procure power over others. The doctrine of deism is worked out in hurried lives. It is embodied in moms going through the "what-if" possibilities on behalf of their children. It is the teenager going through the "what-could-be's" that cultivates a crippling fear of missing out. It is the moralist frozen by the inner critic that states the "what-should-be's."

By word, we can deny the deism, but our hurried lives preach sermons louder than the televangelist. A life on the run is a life reduced because it is life on our own. It is life without God because we spend our lives playing God. To spend our lives playing God is spiritual suicide. That is not an exaggeration.

"Every one of us is shattered by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man that I want to be but who cannot exist because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown by God is altogether too much privacy." ~ Thomas Merton

What is Merton getting at? Our false selves are the selves that God knows nothing about. The sin self. The shadowy self that shed our image-bearing skin in exchange for a hollow shadow, void of substance. The false self is the self that hides from God in the harrowing hell of hurry. The self that only exists apart from God, which is no-thing. The more this fickle flame of self is fed the more our irreproducible image of God selves (our true selves), are extinguished in the great abysmal waters of nothingness. We become no-thing.

The false self is the self that lives out the deistic decree in the hurried life. In "life on our own terms," life. We grow cynical. Our cynicism grows in the slow dissipation of our illusory control. The illusion of our control crumbles, and with it all the meaning that we gave ourselves and the world around us. The meaning we made mattered to us because it was controlled by us. We furnished our lives with hypothetical meaning. Meaning never fully realized. Never fully breathed in. Meaning never concretely touched or tasted and seen as good.

There is a better way. A way in which we become ourselves is by losing ourselves in an unhurried life. A contemplative life. A life where we follow Jesus, and are formed into whom we follow, thus becoming all of ourselves by the laying down of ourselves daily. We become mystics. Mystics who are enthralled by the mysteries of the Christian life.

"A mystery is not something that is contradicted by reason but something that exceeds reason's capacity to discern and describe." Allister MGrath

And so we become poets using our image-bearing imagination that expands our understanding of who God is rather than (out of a desire to contain and control God) disillusioning ourselves in thinking we have grasped God, for as Augustine of Hippo wisely warns "if you think you have grasped God, it is not God who you have grasped." We hold God loosely (in our theologizing, in a sense) who holds us tightly and tenderly. We become Jacob's who nap in fields and see them not as a mere fields, but as a portal. A bethel. A gateway between heaven and earth. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. For the hurried secular man, there is no such thing as sacred in this meaningless world. Oh, for the Christian there is no such thing as secular, but only sacred in this holy world. The unhurried Christian sees every bush as a burning bush. Every field is a bethel. Every mountain is a Sinai. The baptized imagination comes in slowing down. In paying attention. In seeing the world through our poetic, parabolic, story-telling Christ who came as the "light of the world."

Andrew Goins is on staff for a campus ministry at Appalachian State University called Ratio Christi. He also works as a youth leader and worship leader at Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church in Banner Elk. Andrew is committed to simply and thoroughly loving his wife Bethany, growing in his bible nerdiness, delighting in good books (theology, poetry, and select fiction), music, photography, creation, and in gathering people together for bible studies, a shared meal, or making music

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