

Busy, or full?

By [Beth Merrill Neel](#)

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When someone inquires how I am, I often reply, “Good. Life is full.” I say that intentionally because I have grown weary of the excuse of being too busy. There’s an implication that in my busyness I have shut out people I love. My mom will call in the middle of the week and say, “Oh, honey, I just hate to bother you; I know how busy you are.” Even harder is when parishioners say, “Oh, I know you’re so busy, I didn’t want to add one more thing to your plate.”

So I’m working on the discipline of considering my life full rather than considering myself busy. To say that life is full is to acknowledge abundance—an abundance of opportunities to engage in work that I find meaningful and interesting; an abundance of ways for my child to discover the world with friends and to energize body, heart, and soul; an abundance of riches because we have a home and friends and family and neighbors and community.

To say that I am busy puts the focus on just me. I am busy with administrivia and details because no one else can pay attention to them quite the way I can (which is untrue). To say that I am busy makes me feel worthy, because busy people must be important people must be powerful people, right? To say that I am busy implies that every moment is crammed with doing things that must matter a great deal, because why would I cram one more thing into my life if it weren’t deeply important?

I am not busy; my life is full, and I carry with me that beautiful image in Psalm 23: “thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”

Several weeks ago we had a full Sunday, though a little less full than usual because we had a guest preacher. There were details to attend to before the service, details that I consider part of hospitality. Worship was full, because the choir was enormous and sang the Beethoven “Hallelujah” from *Mount of Olives*, and the preacher made us think about important things, and it took the kids a while to warm up during the children’s message, and there were lots and lots of joys and concerns in our prayer time. We sang and we laughed and we listened and none of us was too busy to

worship, and our cups ran over. As did the service. Oh well.

After worship we took the guest preacher to lunch. And then, because his plane wasn't till evening and because he had no other appointments, he came to our house and we lit the first fire of the season in the fireplace and for two hours we just sat and talked. No phones, no agendas, no excuse of busyness. Just conversation, and that was full too. There was a sense of the blessings of space, of room, of hours that were not filled to the brim with stuff. Yes, the house did not get clean and yes, we had cheese and crackers for dinner.

Sometimes when someone asks how I am doing I will say, "Not so good. Life is full." Because sometimes life is full of the hard and sad things: another cancer diagnosis, a divorce, disappointment, grief, fear. Sometimes life is full of the stuff that makes being human difficult and I find myself wanting to declutter a closet or two to give the illusion of spaciousness in the midst of that difficult fullness. But later, when the crisis has past, when I've gained perspective, I am grateful for the fullness. I am grateful that both joy and pain make me feel alive, full of life.

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