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Trinity Musings #23: Rev Brian Goodings (earswideopen@Trinity United Church)

I'm really not trying to scare pedestrians while I'm cycling to work on the Georgian Trail but I seem to do that, at least a couple of times, every day. Some people jump straight up...some jump sideways...some shout...some fear-squeak...and some look like they are going to faint. It's actually as annoying to me as it is to them.

It's not usually my fault.

When I get close to a pedestrian going the same way as I am, I slow right down behind them and speak quietly, with the hope that I will not startle them. I don't ring a bell because I find that to be too impersonal a warning, so instead I tell them that I'm on their left or right. Sometimes I get a response but far more often than not I don't, because so many people have ear-buds in their ears.

This morning (Thursday) everyone (100%) of the people I saw or passed, who were by themselves, were wearing ear-buds. They all had at least some of their attention focused somewhere else. To me, it's the antithesis of "being here now".

Wearing ear-buds is a very common practice in cities, especially on buses and subways. It's a good way of saying, without words, "I'm not really here so don't even try to talk or connect with me, buster".

I can see that the din and noise of a city might be worth blocking but I can't really understand why listening to the birds or frogs or maybe just the quiet isn't enough. (Not to mention the oh-so-earnest warning of the guy on the bicycle.)

What better time to think about life and ideas than being alone on a trail? Psychologists talk about the gift of insight that can come with just letting your mind wander, about on its own. Like the way we have come to over organize our kids, we seem to fear undirected and unscheduled time to just...be.

Perhaps it's a sign that many people just don't want to listen to what the outside world is saying anymore and actually do fear the thoughts they might have if given too much quiet.

I get it. I too am growing very weary of hearing relentlessly depressing news all day every day. I no longer read newspapers and rarely if ever watch television news.

I really can understand why people have tuned out and are carefully curating what they hear.

What we need to hear, more than more raw information, are the discerning voices of wisdom. As Jesus (yep, that guy again) said after sharing a wisdom-parable... "Let anyone with ears, listen".

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Wisdom (aka "Sophia") speaks outside of gates of the city.

It's a way of saying that the Wisdom of life is outside of the propaganda and control of empire. (This might sound a little whoo whoo...) but Wisdom, quietly but persistently speaks from the earth itself. It can wander into and reach our thoughts, if given time and a chance. Wisdom has a voice as old as creation herself.

Not to say that it can't be found in podcasts and new ideas too. Last month, on a drive to Toronto, instead of listening to my now, far too often, boring and predictable CBC radio, my son, Isaac, got me to listen to a podcast from "The Midnight Gospel" hosted by Duncan Trussell. It's full of adult language and adult content and was refreshingly weird and brilliant. It's really "out-there" but I appreciated the break from my normal thinking and constant worrying.

Maybe this is the kind of thing that the ear-bud wearers I pass are listening to as well? Perhaps...but maybe they should also check behind them from time to time too. That would be a wise thing to do. I think I'm pretty speedy but I'm really not and you can see me coming from a looong way off. I'm thinking and listening and not trying to scare anyone. Maybe I should get a horn or a bell too.