

Courtney Godwin:

O God, serve you with gladness, and come before your presence with a song.

Congregation:

For we know that you are God. You yourself has made us, and we are yours. We are your people and the sheep of your pasture.

Courtney Godwin:

We shall enter your gates with thanksgiving, go into your courts with praise. Give thanks to you, and call upon your name.

Congregation:

For you are good, your mercy is everlasting, and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing).

Joe Levy:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Joe Levy:

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus 38:24. "The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure, and he who has little business may become wise."

I'm going to tell a story about how I learned far too late in life that leisure and idleness are very different things. But first I'm going to tell you about the Rhino Principle. You see, I'm a born procrastinator. I'm capable of procrastinating on absolutely anything, but especially writing. It's dogged me all my life. And so one day a friend emailed me an article by the British journalist Paul Johnson, which offered a solution to the problem of procrastination. It's called the Rhino Principle. He says, "A rhino knows only one thing, and that's how to charge. When confronted with an object, it will charge it that object." And so he writes that a writer in crisis should do the same thing. "Stop fussing about that paper," he writes. "Just charge it. Keep charging it until it's finished. That's what the rhino does."

And so the Rhino Principle became my approach to trying to get work done. I'd sit at my desk and I try to force myself to focus until the words came out, except they didn't usually come out. And the more I'd force myself, the less they came out. I'd just sit for hours reminding myself to focus. So let's just say I'd be a terrible rhinoceros.

But I still clung to that Rhino Principle as a last resort, because if focusing on the writing which was what I was there to do, if that didn't work, then what would work? And so almost every time I tried to write,

I'd just get angry at myself. I'd chastise myself for being distracted, for not being a rhinoceros, for not being a Paul Johnson.

Until last winter, I had a revelation. I had a bit of leisure time last winter, and so I let myself indulge in one of my guilty pleasures. Instead of what I was supposed to write, I just kept researching. I love to research and to just try to see where things take me. One article leads to another, and I just love going down that rabbit hole sometimes. But in the past when I got too involved in research, I just pulled back. It just felt like another form of procrastination and I should stop myself. But it was just a fun diversion that kept me from writing. And so I'd go back to staring at my screen and trying to channel rhino.

But a funny thing happened this winter, because I had some leisure time, and so I really luxuriated in the research. After a few days, suddenly I just was able to write. I was ready. It came whether I charged at it or not, it came naturally. And I want to be clear, it still wasn't easy. It still came in fits and starts, but it felt natural. And more importantly, I wasn't angry at myself anymore. I wasn't fighting with myself. It felt amazing.

Around that time, I read a little bit about Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Theory of Flow. Many of you know it. I had heard about it. In short, you're in a flow state when your mind is focused on a challenging task and the rest of the world just melts away. This time reading about it it gave me a shock, because I realized that the very thing that I thought was distracting me, that I thought was procrastination, that was actually flow. That was me diving into the research and the world melting away. And another shock, because reading about flow, they told me, "That's just human nature." It's not idleness, it's not shameful; it's just being human.

And so all those years of trying to be a rhino, I was really just a human. I've given up on the Rhino Principle and the dream of that single minded efficiency. I've decided to focus on something else. And now when my mind wanders, I just remind myself that I'm human and it feels really good. Thanks.

Courtney Godwin:

Will all who are able please rise for prayer. Let us pray. Eternal God, in you we move and breathe and have our being. Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying...

Courtney Godwin and Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

This transcript was exported on Oct 21, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Let us sing the hymn Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound, number 299 found in your [inaudible 00:08:05] hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Courtney Godwin:

Dear God, thank you for making us humans and not rhinos. Remind us of our humanness when we try to be rhinos, but let us continuously charge towards doing your work in the world. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.