

Sermon: Mark 6:7-13,30-32 © The Rev. Kate Heichler; Preached Christ Church La Plata/Wayside
"Come Unto Me" 7 Epiphany, Year C, Sunday, February 24, 2019

Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

Which of the seven spiritual practices in the Way of Love do you find most difficult?

To turn every day to Jesus and accept his love and forgiveness?

To spend some time day learning about him? To pray each day?

To worship each week? To become conscious of being a person of blessing?

To go out in love, crossing boundaries of difference and bringing peace?

Many of us might find those easier to integrate into our lives on a regular basis than the last one: Rest. To make a regular practice of rest a priority is pretty counter-cultural.

Many of us zip around all day, all week, cramming ever more into our calendars.

All our "labor-saving" devices only seem to make time for more obligations.

Raise your hand if you would describe yourself as stressed.

Guess what? The God who loves you, who made you, who has plans for you – this God does not want you stressed.

This God made us so that we function best when rest is not an afterthought.

Our bodies need rest regularly, so all systems that make us tick will work well.

Our brains need the time we are asleep to process all the data and experiences we take in during the day – short that essential time, and we are less healthy and we don't think as clearly.

And our spirits need our bodies and our minds to rest, so we can be creative and re-creative.

Animals need times of rest. Cats excel at it. Even the ground needs fallow time,

to build up nutrients again and be fruitful. Rest is woven into the whole fabric of creation.

And according to our creation story, even God took a rest – the seventh day was for not working and celebrating all that had been accomplished the other six.

When the commandments were written for God's people, one of them commanded rest:

People were to take a Sabbath day each week just to worship and recharge.

I'm not sure why we got so far away from Sabbath. Many Jews keep it holy.

Perhaps some people go overboard with the nitpicky rules, but the principle remains:

One day a week is holy, set apart (which is what holy means), different than the other six.

And on that day we rest and let our bodies and minds and spirits catch up.

I have at times kept a Sabbath day. My definition is: one day to be unproductive.

Can you get more counter-cultural than that in our "get it done" world?

On my Sabbath I can do nothing that is on a to-do list. I can work at cooking, if I choose to offer hospitality, to gather friends around a meal, because that is generative and creative.

But I'd better do the cleaning the day before, and certainly avoid opening email.

I can nap, and lounge, and read, maybe walk if it's not a "should," watch a movie.

But I need to let my mind go slack, not ask much of it.

When I can do that, I wake up so much more able to work the next day.

Ideas start to come again, my sense of humor improves, my wellbeing is better. Sabbath rest is truly one of God's greatest gifts – why do we so often refuse it?

There's a lot that works against our accepting this gift, which is free:

- ◆ Our culture runs on productivity... and the pressure is always increasing; most managers demand more production at faster and faster rates.
- ◆ We can also get addicted to getting things done. I feel super-human when I'm running on all cylinders. Speed begets speed; stress begets stress. It's a vicious cycle
- ◆ The world often defines us by our achievements. We are asked "What do you do?" not "Who are you?"
- ◆ Many of us derive our sense of identity from our work – Our work tells us who we are. But rest reminds us whose we are. God is much less interested in what we do than in who we be.
- ◆ Sometimes we don't want to face the feelings that come up when we slow down. But when we let anger or anxiety, fear or grief come in and be felt, they often subside.

And other people put demands on us. If you're a parent, you may think it impossible to take regular times off the grid – but what a gift you'd give your children, modeling balance instead of incessant stress. Some of the most successful people are regular Sabbath-takers. It actually increases our productivity

But sometimes things come up. We see in the gospels more than once, Jesus heading off by himself or with his disciples, to go apart to pray and rest. And on the way he is presented with some urgent need – a sick person, or a crowd hungry for healing and teaching.

And often he stops and tends to that need, even if it takes days.

But then he goes off and finds rest, and he taught his disciples to do the same.

If God rested, if Jesus rested, why on earth wouldn't we think we can too?

Where in your day can you build in some time for rest – maybe reflection and prayer, maybe just not thinking at all? A short walk at lunchtime?

Where in your week ... Can you imagine taking a Sabbath day? I would love to support you in that – one Lent, I invited the whole church to adopt that spiritual practice.

Where in your year can you take some down-time for a weekend or week?

The spiritual practice of Retreat is one expression of rest.

God's law not only ordained a day a week for all people to rest; it also commanded a Jubilee year, every seven years, when debts would be canceled and people could return to their land.

This Sabbath principle goes deep into issues of justice too – when our society took a day of rest, stores were closed – everyone got to rest, the poor as well as the wealthy, the young and the old, immigrants and long-standing citizens.

Animals got a day of rest – though not those who had to feed them...

The whole system was designed for sanity and peacefulness.

How might you orient yourself toward Rest? When will you take it?

Who do you need to support you? What will you do – or not do?

The invitation to the practice of regular rest is an act of deep faith. It reminds us that it's not all up to us – all that stuff that keeps us from resting, is usually not what matters most. And what matters most – our families, relationships, health – we have little control over. Rest invites us to hand the reigns back to God, at least once a week, maybe several times a day. It invites us into a new relationship with time – we step out of our time into God's time, which is eternal, which is always enough. That's not what the world tells us, but it's what God invites us into. God's space, God's time, the eighth day of the week, eternity. One day, rest is all we will be doing, simply being in love, actively giving and receiving love. Not boring harp strumming on a cloud, but fully at rest, fully being, in love. Why not start practicing now?

Amen.

Mark 6:7-13,30-32

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.