

Slowing Down in a Hurry-Up World Sunday, 9/10/17

1 Today we continue our worship series entitled “Antidotes for the Out-of-Control Life.” Last week we learned from the Psalmist and the apostle Paul about how keeping Christ at the center of our lives can bring us peace in the midst of the storms of life. This morning, as you come to the communion table, we’ll be offering each person a small wooden cross as a reminder you can carry with you to come back to the cross of Jesus. Keep it in your pocket, wear it around your neck- it’s up to you. As we kick off our new church year today, let the cross be a reminder to you that the only lasting peace in this life comes through centering our lives in Christ. When you look at the top part of the cross, let that be a reminder to be growing in prayer. When you look at the bottom part of the cross, let that be a reminder to be growing in your knowledge and love of God’s Word, the Bible. When you look at the right arm of the cross, let that be a reminder to love and serve your brothers and sisters in Christ in Christian fellowship. When you look at the left arm of the cross, let that be a reminder to love and serve your neighbors by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in both action and word. And let the center of the cross remind you that just as the four parts of the cross can’t hold together without their center, none of the things we pursue in our lives of discipleship have any meaning or real power without being centered in a vital relationship with Jesus.

2 We continue our series this morning with “Slowing Down in a Hurry-Up World.” Believe me, the irony of this topic falling on our Fall Kick-Off Sunday didn’t escape me! On the other hand, perhaps this is the perfect day for us to seek God’s help in slowing down.

Although we know from the Bible that God rested on the seventh day after six days of creation, the first time God is actually recorded commanding any people to take a similar day of rest is in Exodus 16. The most plain meaning of Sabbath is “rest.” Most basically, God’s command to rest includes a recognition that we were created to live in a world of rhythms. Just as creation introduced cycles of day and night, seasons of summer, fall, winter, and spring, and varying patterns of stars, moon, and tides, we ourselves were made with internal cycles of sleeping and waking, heart beats, hormones, and aging.

Tyler Ward, in an article on the Sabbath in *Relevant Magazine*, suggested that our problem today isn’t that our lives are out of balance, but that we’ve abandoned our natural

rhythms and the rhythms of creation around us. The intrusion of basic technology, long before the advent of smart phones, texting, and Snapchat, made it easier for us to ignore our natural rhythms. For example, indoor lighting makes it easier for us to work at night. Cars, trains, and airplanes allow us to travel great distances regardless of the season. Monster drinks and espresso machines keep us humming along well into 14-hour work days. But the truth is, even thousands of years before the invention of electricity, God's people struggled with God's commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. We still struggle with that today. Keeping a Sabbath means more than just prohibiting all activity on an arbitrary day of the week. It means disciplining our lives to recover the rhythms we were created to live with and enjoy, for our sakes as well as the sake of our fellow humans who share this journey with us and the rest of creation as well.

Besides keeping a regular Sabbath, there are times we simply need to rest because we've reached the end of our energy, attention, or ability to function well. In our next reading from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus illustrates this kind of rest. I'm reading from Mark, chapter 6, verses 30-32 in the NIV.

{Read Mark 6:30-32, NIV}.

3 Have you ever come home to find the TV on and someone else sitting there in the middle of watching a movie or a TV show? If you try to join them, it always takes a little while to fill in the missing details. Sometimes you can never fully appreciate the show because you missed the parts that came before. Reading the Bible can be like that, and that's true of this very short text from Mark. The first thing to notice is that the apostles were giving a field trip report to Jesus. Where had they been? What had they been doing? We have to go all the way back to verses 7-13 to learn that they had been sent out by Jesus, preaching and healing. I imagine they must have been tired, perhaps in some of the same ways that we feel tired after travelling. But if they had hoped to find rest with Jesus, they were out of luck. Mark tells us that "so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat."¹ Have you ever been there? Have you ever worked and worked and then worked some more, only to come home to find that there's more work

¹ Mark 6:31, New International Version

waiting for you, like mowing the lawn, washing laundry, or doing homework? Jesus knew that the apostles needed a break, so he invited them to do two things: Come with Jesus to a quiet place, and get some rest.

4 Do you have any quiet places to go to in your life? It seems to me that it's harder and harder to find quiet places. I live on a third of an acre, so the sounds of roaring lawn mowers, whining weed whippers, and barking dogs is a staple part of my home environment. Some of you live near train tracks that you can not only hear, but also feel as they go by. My brother lives in a part of Blaine that suffered storm damage recently, so he's been enjoying a daily chorus of pneumatic roof nailers. Even if you live in a relatively uncrowded area, it's difficult to find a spot in the greater Twin Cities area that doesn't have some background hum from a nearby freeway, or the sound of a jet passing overhead. One of the most striking sensations I experience whenever I visit the Boundary Waters Canoe Area is the often complete silence of noise from people or contraptions, just the sound of the wind blowing through the trees and the water lapping up against the rocks. When I need to slow down, sometimes I visualize just that- sitting on a rock in the middle of the BWCA, listening to the sound of the wind and the waves.

Why do you suppose Jesus suggested a quiet place? The authors of the book, *One Square Inch of Silence*,² suggest this about our need for silence:

Good things come from a quiet place. Study, prayer, music, transformation, worship, communion. The words peace and quiet are all but synonymous, often spoken in the same breath. A quiet place is the think tank of the soul – the spawning ground of truth and beauty. A quiet place outdoors has no physical borders or limits to perception. One can commonly hear for miles and listen even farther. A quiet place affords sanctuary for the soul, where the difference between right and wrong becomes more readily apparent. It is a place to feel the love that connects all things, large and small, human and not; a place where the presence of a tree can be heard. A quiet place is a place to open up all your senses and come alive.

Jesus is still inviting us to come to a quiet place when we need rest. Maybe Jesus is nudging your heart today. Do you need some rest? Where can you find a quiet place? When

² www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single/201407/quiet-do-we-need-it-now-more-ever

I was in college and seminary I used to like going to the library to study because it was the quietest place I could find on campus. Whether you go to the library or go to your basement, find a quiet place.

5 Another thing to notice in this short passage is that the apostles were asked to come away with Jesus rather than to go away on their own. Believe it or not, it is possible to share a quiet place with another person, sharing a cup of coffee with slow conversation or without any words exchanged at all. When you've been in a relationship with someone long enough, it's possible to let go of the need to be in constant motion and conversation. Some of my favorite vacation memories are of just sitting in the shade with Jana, each of us reading a good book. The same can be true with our relationship with Jesus. Coming away to a quiet place with Jesus can feel a little awkward at first. We might be self-conscious, worried about what to say or what not to say, how to make a good impression. But as we spend more time with Jesus, we can learn to be more comfortable with silently spending time together, resting in God's presence. There's a kind of rest that comes from resting in God's presence that transcends the kind of rest that restores our weary muscles and sleep-deprived brains. Jesus is inviting you to come away with him to a quiet place. Find a time and a place to do that soon, and receive the healing presence of God's Spirit.

6 Now let's look ahead in this Gospel story, because in the several verses that follow the ones we read this morning, we discover that despite the good intentions of the apostles and even Jesus himself, the crowds managed to thwart their plan to get some rest. Mark writes, "But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them."³ Jesus, of course, responded to the crowd with compassion, but eventually even Jesus needed to rest. What are the things that tend to distract you from finding your quiet place and time with Jesus? Is it the smart phone notifications of emails, text messages, and Facebook postings? Turn it off for an hour. Is it the nonstop phone calls? Let the phone ring- if it's really important, they'll leave a message.

There will inevitably be days when you can't find a quiet place and time, just as it was for Jesus. But if you're not intentional in at least trying to find some quiet time, the hurry-up

³ Mark 6:33, New International Version

world we live in will eventually sweep you up like a dead branch floating on a flooded river. None of us want to be dead branches or leaves, so distracted from God's presence that we're blown away by the winds of life's worries. We need to come away with Jesus to a quiet place where we can nourish our rootedness in God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's peace. We need to come back to the cross.

7 There's a great Sara Groves song entitled, "Just One More Thing." The refrain goes like this: "And love to me is when you put down that one more thing and say I've got something better to do. And love to me is when you walk out on that one more thing and say nothing will come between me and you. Not even one more thing."

Only you can say what that "one more thing" is that comes between you and Jesus. But one thing is very clear: Adding more activities and business to your life at the expense of the ability to find times of holy rest in the presence of Jesus is like running on a hamster wheel. It's fun to watch hamsters play on them, but it's deadly for us when we can't get off.

Is God prompting you today to make a change in your life that allows you to get some holy rest? What quiet place is God inviting you to visit? Or perhaps you've been resting enough, and God is calling you back into gear for the good of the Gospel message.

Please pray with me. *God of the Sabbath, you created us for both rest and work. We confess that we tend to get swept up into action, forgetting about our need to come to a quiet place with you and rest. Receive our offerings this morning as our response to your limitless grace and love. Amen.*



Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!



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