BUFFALO UNITED METHODIST

Sun, Apr 19 – Relax: Every Road, Every Room *Proverbs 3:6a*

Before we get started, I would just like to assure any of you who may have been concerned. If you were wondering if I was able to savored my treat last Sunday after church.

Oh, I did!

I ate it slowly, savoring every creamy chocolatey melty moment. I relished it, with great delight. It was so good. And friends, that's good self-care!

And look…I have another one!

Honestly, I was surprised how this chocolate illustration became such a focus for us last week. Maybe I shouldn't underestimate the power of chocolate?

We are in our second week of our Relaxed sermon series, Walking With the One Who is Not Worried About a Thing. We are exploring what it would feel like if we slowed down and savored…see what I did there?…savored walking with Jesus who is NOT worried about a thing.

We might just taste the fruit of "relaxed". Is this what the psalmist meant when we read in Psalm 34, "**Taste and see that the Lord is good."?**

At first glance, I thought her book title was RELAX. But her title is RELAXED. Rember Dallas Willard calling Jesus relaxed?

For one, it is not helpful to tell people to "relax", even if we need to.

It is very similar to when someone says, "You need to calm down."

Umm…that phrase has never helped anyone in the history of needing to calm down, to actually calm down. Right?

So, this series is not about becoming "relax police".

The "Relaxed" title is meant to intentionally take the emphasis off ourselves and put it on the One who is relaxed.

The "relaxed" title helps us shift our focus off ourselves and on to Jesus, who is always relaxed, who is our only hope of actually relaxing.

The One calling us to a “settled trust” in the One who wants us to relish, delight, and savor being relaxed.

So, enough said, let’s all just relax about that.

Now re-centering ourselves on Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; [6] **in all your ways submit to him**, and he will make your paths straight.”

We will be focusing on this phrase, **“in all your ways submit to him”.**

This phrase is all inclusive. It is uncompromising in its totality. The author of proverbs, King Solomon, carefully chose language that drew a circle around everything in our lives.

Nothing is excluded.

This includes our whole heart, every part and every room inside our being. Every road or path, literal or metaphorical that we walk down.

Whatever we are doing, wherever we are in life, whatever road we are on right now. We can and need to follow this wisdom. This is for all of us.

Some sermons are for some of us, but today’s sermon is for all of us.

Perhaps some of us are hearing echoes in this uncompromising totality? Is it sound familiar?

Deuteronomy 6:5, **“[5] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”**

In Mark chapter 12 and in Matthew chapter 22 Jesus says, **[30] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’**

We hear we are to submit all of who we are to the Lord.

We are to surrender, yield, lay down our defenses, let go of resistance, unlock closed places, soften our wills, and throw open wide the doors of our heart in EVERYTHING in complete settled trust.

Not quite there this morning?

Then just give the Lord what you can.

By grace, the Lord will make up the difference.

God will meet you here, right now.

Trust.

And as I read and prepared for today, she talked about trials, mistakes, grief, money, friendships, and risk, and grief…one kept popping to the surface.

I tried to push it down but it kept popping back up, it was as futile as keeping a beach ball under water.

So, today we will focus on submitting our grief to God. I'll be sharing briefly some of WHAT, WHY and HOW of grief from my own journey and neat insights from the Relaxed book.

On September 21st, 2000, at 2:11pm in the afternoon, my mother passed away. And my life caved in on itself.

Think of an empty 50 gallon drum, lowered into the ocean until it reaches that point where the pressure is too much, and it silently implodes. That is what it felt like.

When I encountered the grief of losing a close family member for the first time, I knew nothing about what was coming my way.

I had no idea losing my mother was going to unleash such a violent wave of grief that engulfed my life.

It was radically reorienting. Everything changed.

I felt like there was only a thin sliver of me that existed and the rest of me was pain.

I lost three years of my life stumbling and falling down drunk—drunk on grief.

And so began my difficult and long journey of surrendering this part of my life to God.

Somewhere in my grief, I came across Ecclesiastes 7:2, **"It is better to go to a home of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone, the living should take this to heart."**

And I realized I had moved in.

I became locked in, in this house of weeping.

I barely existed.

The loss was everything.

I listlessly roamed the grey rooms of that house of grief in silence, blinds drawn, only wanting my mom.

And I began to learn some hard truths about grief.

We grieve because we love.

Grieving is an act of love.

We will always love those we lose, and therefore in some way we will always grieve.

But the grief will mellow.

And we learn we were never meant to be separated from those we love. Sin did that.

And we begin to appreciate this hard-won truth in a deeper way, Jesus conquered sin and repaired our hope of re-uniting with our loved ones.

There are many "why's" to why God allows us to grieve. I can't speak to the "whys" of why did my loved one have to die.

Here is my favorite "why" as to why God allows us to grieve. I only have one.

When we grieve, we actually draw very close to the One who created us.

Grief gently ushers us into the very presence of God, whether we recognize it or not.

It opens a door into something God wants very much for us:

Himself.

God allows us to grieve to discover that heaven is not our reward, it is God in heaven who is our reward.

God desires that we desire him. And grief teaches us that God is our goal.

And in that sorrow, we begin to experience how close God truly is. **"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Ps 34:18)**

And we will cling to these truths:

" The God of all comfort…comforts us in all our troubles," (2 Corin. 1:3-4)

As we grieve, we experience the ineffable comfort—meaning the comfort is too beautiful, too sacred, too deep to fully explain—of God grieving with us.

Give me Jesus, who grieves with me.

As much as we may feel alone, and even abandoned by God, we do not grieve alone.

God is there.

And there is no other place God would rather be.

Because God is well acquainted with grief, comfortable with loss, and infinitely patient with us.

We can take all the time we need to grieve. As we surrender our grief and go walking with the One who is not worried about a thing.

Lastly, we ask how might we grieve well?

How do we surrender and yield our grief to God in ways that are good and helpful? I think one way includes in how we think about heaven.

I love what the author shared. A pastor she heard once named, Kyle Idleman, once wondered if the author of Revelation felt like human language could not describe what heaven was going to be like.

So, Kyle, created a list in his smart phone to in dreaming of won't be in heaven. Every time he thought of something he would take note. You might want to try it.

That might sound odd. Understanding heaven by thinking about what won't be there.

Then our author created a wonderful list I need to share. You might want to close your eyes.

In Heaven, there will be no more:

…death, mourning, crying, pain, cancer, affairs, anxiety, heart disease, cerebral palsy, CPAP machines, foster care, prescriptions, worry, divorce, rejection, loneliness, feeling left out.

And no more laundry. Well, she wasn't sure about that.

No more self-consciousness, apathy, arguments, suffering, longing, fear, depression, family dysfunction, wheelchairs, abuse, nightmares, waiting for test results, radiation and chemo, racism, self-hate, sexual abuse, eating disorders, comparisons, failure, breakups, acne, suicide, sin, dissatisfaction, burdens, pornography, alcoholism, wrinkles, muffin tops, angry neighbors, persecution, welfare, glasses, dead grass, browning plants, single parenting, prosthetics, disability, funeral homes, nursing homes, waiting rooms, double chins, traffic, hormones, dieting, shame, blame, hiding, condemnation, accusations, fear of the future, heart attacks, gossip, sadness, badness, grief, and no more hope.

Wait? What?

No hope? That can't be right?

Marshman's friend Jeff Carter once said, **"Heaven will be the absence of hope – not in the sense of hopelessness but in a sense of completion and fulfillment. There will no longer be a need for hope. Hope is what drives us to look to heaven as our actual home. When we arrive home, we will be complete. We will have peace. We will be with God – which is the ache of every human heart."**

And to that and all that has been shared, **"Thank you God for heaven…our hope of heaven found in the Risen Lord."**

And so, church, perhaps the invitation today is simple but holy: do not carry your grief alone any longer but instead submit it. Bring it to Jesus.

Bring Him the ache, the questions, the tears, and even the silence. He is not afraid of your sorrow. He meets you in it, sits beside you in it, and when you are ready, gently leads you through it.

The same Lord who wept at Lazarus's tomb walks with us through every valley of shadow and loss. Hold fast to this promise: grief may shape us, but it does not define us.

In Christ, we know mourning will give way to peace and sorrow will one day give way to unsurpassed and eternal joy.

Amen.

In our **Time of Reflection:**

1. What part of your heart is still living in a "house of mourning," and how might God be inviting you to surrender that grief, to come out and into His presence today?

2. How has grief or loss opened your heart to experience God's comfort, closeness, and the hope of heaven in a deeper way?