

## **Sermon: July 18, 2021**

### **“Happiness is a Little Peace and Quiet”**

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Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-12, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

As any good parent will tell you, the sounds of laughter coming from the bedrooms of your children are a joy to hear... a joy that is, unless it's well past their bedtime and you've already told them several times to GO TO BED. When it's past their bedtime, of course, your joy comes in the blissful silence that comes with letting sleeping babies lie. I remember when the boys were born and family members would want to wake them up when they arrived for visits and I never forgot the advice my grandmother gave me about letting sleeping babies sleep. That peace and quiet that comes in the brief moments they sleep is about all the peace and quiet a new parent is going to get. And we should revel in that peace—even if, as new parents, that quiet will be full of little chores we must do to keep them fed and clothed.

But there is something about silence that is soothing. Something about the quiet moments in life that are vital to our physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. We cannot keep going, going, going 24/7 and expect that our bodies will respond as they always have. Rest is a necessary part of life. And Jesus knows this, too. He orders the disciples to get up and go to a deserted place. Sensing their fatigue, which, by this time in the story would have been as much physical as emotional and even spiritual, he tells them now is the time to rest. They have taught and healed, traveled and shaken the dust off their sandals, been rejected and welcomed. Now they must rest

for a bit, eat, pray, sleep, hear the sounds of nature around them in a place where people aren't crying out constantly in their need. "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*" he tells them, because they haven't even had time to sleep so much as eat.

But, of course, even in rest, people have needs. Even when we need to take a breather, injustice, pain, suffering, hunger, these very real human problems don't stop because the disciples or we need a break. You know, I'm reminded of a Peanuts cartoon where Snoopy is busying himself with yard work and thinks, "I never worked so hard in all my life, I wonder if it's all right to rest on this job." So he sits down and in no time Lucy is yelling at him, "NO RESTING!" And he thinks, "I wonder why I wondered?" Lucy is like the people in this story and the Snoopy like the disciples and Jesus. Just when they think they can take a breather, here come the people whose needs are so urgent they rush to the other side of the sea before the disciples even get there by boat. The scripture says that Jesus, seeing the immediacy of their need, has compassion for them because, "They are like sheep without a shepherd." You may have noticed this morning that our Call to Worship was Psalm 23—a Psalm, incidentally, that I used in our morning prayer time on Thursday. A Psalm, a prayer, that is familiar and comforting to us at various points in our lives. But it's also good to remember verse 2—He *makes* me lie down in green pastures. Not encourages. Not suggests. Not sweet-talks. The LORD *makes* me lie down in green pastures. In other words, friends, REST.

It's even a commandment – one of the ten handed down to Moses – Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. The other six days you can

work—but on that seventh day, you rest from that work. And, really, in the modern world with all the entrapments that keep us busy with our busyness (and the business of others, ahem), we should be taking two days away from our work—and at least one of those should be fully devoted to rest. Again, not a suggestion – a commandment. Rest.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians says that in Jesus alone we find our peace. That Jesus has erased the divisions between us. And yet we remain, so many of us, at war with our bodies. Running ourselves ragged to the point that we're almost hostile to our bodies. In Jesus we know, however, that we can find not just peace, but rest.

Still, rest is hard to come by. If you have little ones in your care, so much the harder. But it's no less important. No less vital. And that's not just our weekly rest that matters, but daily rest. And if you look to Ezekiel 34, even animals need rest. For us, however, it's not just rest, but peace of mind. Psalm 116:7 says, return, O my soul, to your rest. And I think this is why Jesus encourages them to go to a deserted place to rest—how can you find rest amidst the busyness of life when so much noise surrounds you? Lacking that peace of mind, it's nearly impossible to truly rest. And without true rest, we find our resources depleted to the point of collapse. We see Jesus draw away to a quiet place to pray many times throughout scripture. We see in 1 Kings that Elijah exhausts himself to the point of collapse, so he goes away to a deserted place and God sends an angel to feed him cake and tells him to take a nap.

Sometimes, though, rest feels indulgent. We feel like it's a luxury we can't afford. Like, when we rest, we're doing something we shouldn't be doing.

And for many of us who work in compassion-fueled fields, it's such a part of who we are to care for others that we forget to take care of ourselves. Some of my greatest joys are when I am able to offer some comfort to others who are struggling. This is never truer than when I can do this for my Donna or my kids. But this week, I've been feeling a bit run down. I, like the disciples, had hit a bit of a wall and needed to rest a little more than usual. My cup, quite apart from running over, was running dry. I needed to rest. And, I got a sign that I simply didn't have the luxury *not* to rest. Because, you see, as the saying goes, you cannot pour from an empty cup. I can't support my people—including my church—if I am exhausted. You can't support yours, including your church, if you don't rest.

All this to say, rest is essential to our being. It is essential to our physical health. Our mental health. Our emotional health. And, in case you didn't get it already from my numerous scriptural mentions: it is essential to our spiritual health.

When you get right down to it, rest, really, is a spiritual practice. It takes discipline to go to bed before we've finished watching the latest episode. To step away from work—even when we love it. To stop exerting ourselves before we've hit our limit. But it's important because when our rest and self-care are on point, we tend to be happiest. I have a sign in my home office above my bookshelf that shows Snoopy lounging on his doghouse and it simply says, "Happiness is a little peace and quiet." Even Snoopy knows that rest is essential to our being. While the disciples and Jesus were pursued in their efforts to practice self-care and while Jesus, of course, had compassion for those who met them at the other shore, it doesn't change

the fact that their aim was rest. Their goal was to make sure that the importance of their rest, renewal, and refreshment was not overlooked. And friends, if Jesus needed rest—you can bet we do, too. Take care of yourself. You wouldn't let your cell phone battery get down to 5%, don't let your own batteries get that low, either. Rest. Amen.