**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**Portland, Oregon**

**Proper 11**

**2 Samuel 7:1 -14a**

**Ephesians 2:11-22**

**Psalm 89:20-37**

**Mark 6:30-34,53-56**

**Sabbath**

Rabbi Levi saw a man running in the street, and asked him, “Why do you run?” He replied, “I am running after my good fortune!” Rabbi Levi tells him, “Silly man, your good fortune has been trying to chase **you**, but you are running too fast.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s a wonderful old tale included in Wayne Muller’s book Sabbath, published 20 years ago which I’ve turned to more than once to be reminded how to slow down and take a break.

“There’s no rest for the weary,” is a phrase that has come down to us from the 19th century and is meant to be humorous, a kind of tongue-in-cheek way of saying that no matter how tired we are, we have to keep on working. Actually, we can thank the Prophet Isaiah for starting the whole thing with his words, “The Lord God said, peace is not to wicked men,”[[2]](#footnote-2) and again, “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest….”[[3]](#footnote-3) In other worlds, there is no rest for the wicked.

But as God well knows, wicked or not, we all get tired. Weariness is not exclusive to the sinful or the sick, to busy parents, busy executives, people on their way up, sliding down, or stuck in the middle, teachers of overflowing classrooms, students balancing work and studies, people working two or three jobs just to make ends meet, and today, all around the world, wrestling with whether to mask or not to mask. For a vast variety of reasons, we all get tired.

We get tired of computers that are supposed to make our lives easier, but tend to consume our time, especially when they don’t cooperate. We are fatigued by the daily news, that shocks our senses, makes us work harder to hold on to hope, and muddies our vision for the future.

And even though we try to keep up our strength by getting enough sleep, eating decent food and the like, ….we too often find ourselves running, running, running to keep up with it all. No wonder coffee shops are so successful!

We are not just victims of the world’s expectations. We’re pretty good at loading ourselves down with work. Whether with work, or play, as many of our young children experience, we continue to overload ourselves. We load our calendars with “to do’s” and our children are booked into camps all summer long, leaving little time for simply lying on one’s back in the grass to stare up at the passing clouds. When was the last time you did that with your kids, young or grown, or even by yourself? When we talk to each other, one of our most common topics of conversation has to do with all the work we have done, have to do and plan to do for as far into the future as we can see. We have created a society which considers tiredness and fatigue a symbol of success and achievement…and we add on the outcomes of our fatigue, by comparing the degree of our pain as a result of it….migraines, heartburn, sore muscles.

We have fashioned a way of life that lifts up fatigue like an Olympic gold medal. The only problem is, we are in a race of our own making and we invite ourselves to compete in it….and the gold medal looks like gold on the outside, while on the inside it is likely to resemble something that feels like lead.

Yet to be working so hard that we are exhausted, effectively shields us from all that God has intended for us. What God wants us to be able to accomplish seems next to impossible to deliver, because we are too tired from all the busyness that is **not** God’s work. We give thanks for Sunday mornings that beckon to us as oases a the end of our weeks of work and worry.

“Come to me all that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,” [[4]](#footnote-4) says Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. And today, in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus suggests the same to his apostles. They had been working hard….walking, teaching, talking, explaining, convincing, over and over again…so much so, that they didn’t have time to eat. They probably weren’t sleeping much either…keeping on the move as they were.

We can assumed there was a pre-arranged time for them to come back from their labors to report to Jesus how everything was going, because….according to Mark, they do just that. Like all laborers out in the field, be it farm work, sales or evangelizing, they report in to headquarters.

After listening to the stories that his disciples told him as they gathered round him, rather than taking time for teaching moments, suggestions on how they could improve on their work, or how they could do better, in his compassion for their fatigue, he recognized that they needed to rest and refresh themselves. What a relief that must have been and don’t we wish that we could hear those words after we have completed a job and done it well. “great progress…now get some rest…..well done!” Jesus sees that the disciples are tired and, like a gentle rain that comes after a prolonged drought, his words fall softly around his faithful followers, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

“Come away….and rest a while.” They are words that each of us would welcome, in our own worlds of work. And, it is good for us to recognize that the words are meant for all God’s disciples, not only those gathered around Jesus in his time, but all of us today.

So many of us work hard for the church and we feel called to ministries that require much of us. We are motivated by our Christian faith to assist a troubled world. There is much we expect of ourselves as faithful Christians and to be sure, we want to do the work in the name of God and in the service of God’s people. But we find ourselves running out of steam and falling behind and we become anxious that we are not doing all that God wants us to do and we don’t feel as fulfilled as we hoped.

From our worldly perspective, we come short of our own expectations and our busyness and the subsequent fatigue of each, serves to signal our misdirection of effort, our mistaken illusions that all we are doing is somehow pleasing to God. As long as we cling to the illusion that we will be right with God if we run farther and faster doing good deeds, adding to our to do list for God, the less time we will allow for stopping long enough to take stock and ask ourselves, “What is it that God is really asking me to do?

But when the disciples gathered around Jesus, their stories of work, work and more work, tumbling over each other in their telling, about people, people, people….everywhere, all the time…never leaving them alone…no time to eat. Jesus said….stop…rest….spend some time **alone.** It’s not easy, because the world never stops its demands, but you must try to find that quiet place.

Jesus knew they needed to rest….they needed to take time to contemplate the important from the trivial, so that they could continue their work in a more focused way. A way built on passion rather than necessity….call rather than anxious desire to be right with God.

God invites us into a place and time we call Sabbath, and we have accepted that invitation on this Sunday morning to come for Sabbath time. For rest and renewal time, for reckoning our priorities, for making decisions about how to take time for laughter and delight.

Jesus welcomes hearing of the good works of his disciples and recognizes their passion about what they are doing. He wants to participate in that passion and in their stories as he does in ours. But he wants his disciples and wants us to rest ourselves so that we can do our work for God to the fullest. There’s a vast difference between doing the work God has called us to do, and doing good works, or any work, just because we think it’s the right thing to do, or it will get us in good with God, or with each other, or will bring us status or visibility or that it will simply reveal to the world that we are in the worldly race to success.

When we are doing the work that God is calling us to do….we still work hard, we still get tired, but it is the kind of tiredness that is fulfilling and satisfying and it is the kind of work that will **allow us to take our rest**, without guilt or with out fear of being left behind or being deemed unsuccessful.

When I was out walking early yesterday morning, I came across a man digging up a strip of deeply embedded grass iin his front garden. He was digging deeply in order to get at all the roots, because he said, he wanted to put in a flower border. It was clearly a big job, but he was quick to agree, that the work was a labor of love, and even though he had a goal in mind, he would do just what he could today, and come back to work in the cool of tomorrow’s morning. Instead of feeling dissatisfied that he couldn’t do the work all at one time, he could rest from his labors and feel fulfilled in having accomplished part of the work today, to be continued tomorrow.

God wants us to rest so that we can go out and do the work again tomorrow. God calls us to come together to be replenished….away by ourselves….away to this church this morning, and to another at home or away this afternoon. God wants us to find a place of peace, be it in our homes, in our minds, our hearts or by the beach or the backyard….no matter, as long as we are there to give thanks for where it is we find ourselves and for the peace that is given to us there.

In his compassion, Jesus sees what we need amid our worldly concerns, just as he moved to respond to the needs of the crowds closing in on his own need to find rest for himself and his disciples.

The Book of Exodus teaches, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”[[5]](#footnote-5) To keep Sabbath, we have to prepare for it, to enter into it and to keep it holy until its end. We can begin by embracing rest rather than fearing it. We can take time to move to the rhythm of creation, feeling ourselves as part of it. We can look at time past, present and future, not worrying about its passing, but relishing the gifts it has, and continues to, offer up to us. We can take time for love and loving. For happiness and contentment in the moment, regardless of what the world has waiting for us outside of our Sabbath time. Perhaps we can take time to dwell on the good in us and others, to understand ourselves as one simple part of the flow of things, rather than one who needs to control them. Perhaps we can take time to be mindful of all we encounter during our Sabbath. To notice that all is holy, given to us for our enjoyment for a quick moment in time. Life is a fleeting thing. How sweet to end it knowing that one took time to savor it fully and completely in the early morning light, at dusk’s sunset, by an afternoon river or a night time’s moonlight.

No matter our age or circumstances, perhaps we are beginners at this new practice called Sabbath, and we can begin to practice preparing for and entering into our own Sabbath Day on Saturday, and upon waking up on Sunday morning, giving thanks for the day of rest we call Sunday. Whatever day of the week we can plan our Sabbath time, we can learn to plan our work time on the day before the Sabbath or the day after. Perhaps our should do’s, the bills, the vacuuming, the repairing of the porch, can wait for 24 hours, or be accomplished prior to your Sabbath, keeping the Sabbath clear and pure, as it is intended to be by God. A time and place for rest, enjoyment, timelessness, for creation and re-creation. Perhaps for the man I met digging up his lawn, that work is his Sabbath. If not, then I hope he will find the strength to lay down his shovel and invite his family to rest with him, until the time comes for him to pick up his shovel again.

The ninth verse of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes says “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The Night Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book prays, “what has been done, has been done. What has not been done, has not been done. Let it be.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Let it be. Let it be Sabbath. Embrace it. Honor it. Protect it….. because it is another precious day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

July 18, 2021

1. Traditional Tale quote. *Sabbath, Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives.* Wayne Muller, (Bantam Books, NY 1999) p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Isaiah 48:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 57:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 11:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Exodus 20:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ecclesiastes 1:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The New Zealand Prayer Book: Compline [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Psalm 118:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)