

Christ Church + Washington Parish
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli
Way of Love Series: Rest
Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 11:25-30¹

Today we continue our Way of Love series exploring the spiritual practices of the faith, and the practice of the day is Rest. I may be the least qualified person to speak to you about this spiritual practice, though I know that I have some competition in this room for that title. Rest does not come naturally to me. It is something that I enjoy in idea form more than in actuality. Which is why every Monday, my day off, I think I'm going to rest and I rarely do. There is just always something to do – cleaning, schedule planning, grocery shopping, oh, and working.

But I'm not alone. Over the summer, the Bishop of Washington surveyed Episcopalians in our area as she was preparing to preach on the Way of Love and asked which of the seven practices came more easily and which were more difficult. Nearly everyone who responded said that rest was the most difficult. "I'm not good at resting," one confessed. "I was raised to work". "I'm not sure I know how to rest."² Even those who are retired struggle with rest. Either actually resting or finding rest fulfilling after decades of defining their lives by accomplishments or activity.

¹ *I do not read my sermons so actual wording of sermon may be different when preached. Lots of grace would be appreciated for grammatical errors as I write for the ear.*

² These quotes and additional ideas throughout this sermon come from Bishop Mariann Budde's sermon on Rest in her Way of Love series <https://www.edow.org/about/bishop-mariann/writings/category/sermons/page/2>

Now some of you don't struggle with rest. Rather than resent you, we should learn from you, because rest is a core spiritual practice of our faith. The way we most often talk about this practice is about keeping Sabbath – a full day of rest. For those who struggle resting an hour, I feel your annoyance with the notion of resting a full day. But that is the ideal as described in Scripture.

There are two traditions around the creation of the Sabbath. First tradition is from Genesis; God rested on the seventh day after making creation - observing our own day of rest connects us to this essential part of the creative force of God. We need rest to be part of what God is doing in the world - rest is part of allows God to work in us. Also, to remember that God is at work in the world – it isn't all on us, as our psalm today keeps drawing our attention to. The second tradition is linked to the Exodus story. Slaves could not take a day off, but free people could and the seventh day became a way to live into that freedom that God provides. We forget our freedom. We live in world that never stops. There are more options than ever for activities to spend our time. More ways that we can work beyond the bounds of 9 to 5. More ways that we can fill each and every moment. But we don't have to. We have the freedom to stop, to pull ourselves away from our tasklist, to not respond to the false urgent. We are free.

Sabbath is resistance to the tyranny of productivity. It is resistance to the notion that our lives are what we do, what we accomplish. You may have heard it put more simply: We are human beings, not human doings. To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for even one

day a week, or one hour a day, is a startling display of pride that denies the sufficiency of God and the gifts of others.³ Resting reminds you that it is not all on your shoulders. It reminds you to take moments to see what isn't right in front of you but may be trying to catch your attention on the sidelines.

In the gospel text today, Jesus say, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." It would be so much easier to rest if the next thing Jesus said was, "I'll take your yoke from you." But he doesn't. Rest does not happen once we lay down our burdens or once they get to be light enough that we don't have to worry about them. It happens amidst carrying them, and if we take Jesus up on the offer of his yoke, it is burdens that he carries with us.

Rest can be elusive, even if it is a weekly priority. It was for Jesus. His plans for rest were frequently interrupted by others' needs – someone needs to be healed, someone is possessed by a demon, the boat he's sleeping on is taking on water in a storm and someone needs to stop the storm. Jesus allows himself to be interrupted, at least in the times we know about, but he didn't give up his pursuit for rest, and because of that, he found opportunities for rest too. Not a whole day, not on a reliable schedule. But he pursued rest as a priority, and so found enough of it to keep himself connected to the creative movement of God in the world and his freedom to be part of it.

³ From Chapter 6 "Keeping Sabbath" p.86 by Dorothy C. Bass in *Practicing Our Faith*, 1997.

God wants us to rest. Rest is a priority for God. It is a task to accomplish for those who benefit from a task list. Every week. What might it look like to live that? The answer is likely different for each person, depending on what helps them feel rested. For some that might be a long bike ride, for others readings a book, for others doing a puzzle or playing a game. For others, visiting museums or spending the afternoon with grandchildren. Whatever it is, can you imagine living that out as a priority in your life – as important as getting dinner on the table or showing up for your favorite gym class?

Sabbath as a full day of rest is still elusive to me. It's not even on the horizon as an achievable goal, but if it is for you, go for it. If it's not then join me in stretching yourself to make rest a priority – whether that means setting aside 10 minutes a day or a morning a week. And see what happens. I'd hazard to guess that if God thought rest was so important that he included it in his first seven days of creating and put it on two rounds of Ten Commandments, then there is probably something of value to find by getting a little better at it.

Turning to the collect of the day, "O God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved," may we trust that enough to prioritize rest.