

REST-oration and Wellness

Mark 5:21-43

There is a line from a song that has stayed with me since I was a youth, and I often hear it in my mind when I am feeling anxious. It comes from a song and it refers back to a passage from Isaiah. The line is this: “Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.” How can that statement not be comforting to someone? To know that no matter what, you don’t need to fear, that God is with you, and God will give you rest. I think many people feel the same way when they talk about Psalm 23, where God is leading us into a place of peace, into that grassy meadow where we are at peace with ourselves and with God. To know that God is always there, and that Jesus is leading us to a space of rest is what we are talking about today.

We’ve all heard statements like, “It’s the cycle of life,” and “What goes around, comes around.” Right from the start of Creation, God added an important step to the cycle. A rhythm to the daily living, where once a week, there would be a day of rest. On the seventh day, God rested. God calls us into that time to enter a time of Sabbath, which allows not only humans, but all of Creation the opportunity to rest and be restored. It’s an opportunity and a practice that helps us to move back to a place of balance, a place of wellness. In order to be restored, we must rest.

There are many examples in our daily lives about this principle. For instance, if we’re exercising – maybe doing some weightlifting – when you’re building muscles, it’s important not to overtrain them. You do need to take physical rest, a day off. During that time of rest, your muscles are repairing themselves. I’m not a scientist, but I’ve heard that they are mending themselves back together. It actually helps to increase your strength over time.

If we take that into consideration, we also have to do the same for our spirits, for our souls. We need to stretch our souls and we need to give our souls rest. As always, God’s meaning of rest has many layers of understanding. Not only is God calling us to do less physical work on the Sabbath. But God is also calling us to

spiritually rest, to emotionally rest, to socially rest, and to intellectually rest. Sabbath practice calls us to rest where? In the grace of God. We need to imagine that we are being held in the arms of God, wrapping us with that sense of peace and calm, strength, security. That is what Sabbath is about.

We often refer to this as *shalom*. A sense of shalom. Shalom is a state of peace in which there is no strife, no fighting, no fear, and no distrust. When was the last time you felt that kind of peace? When was the last time you felt that you were in a state where there was no strife in your life? No strife in the world; no fighting amongst family and friends; no fear of what was to come; and pure trust in God. Can you remember the last time? What did it feel like? Where were you? What do you personally need to take a rest from in order to be restored and come to that place of balance and wellness?

In the passage from Mark that we read today, we hear the story of a woman who longed to be healed of that which ailed her. Her ailment would have made her an outcast in society, as she was considered to be unclean. Untouchable. No one should be near her. Yet on this day, as Jesus was passing through the village with his disciples, she had the courage, the tenacity to break the rules. To reach out and touch this holy man that she had heard about, fully believing that if she did, she would be healed. She would be restored. With great determination, she pushed her way through that crowd, touched him, and immediately, she felt different. She felt restored and healed. So when Jesus then asked who touched him, he also had felt this exchange of love and healing. The woman didn't run away. Didn't hide. But stepped forward, fell to her knees in front of him and told him the whole story. To which he responded with, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, healed of your disease." Such a beautiful statement: "Go, for your faith has made you well." Isn't that what we all long for?

Anytime we come across healing passages, these miraculous passages of Jesus healing people, there are many people in our midst who face chronic pain. Who are dealing with suffering throughout their lives, who have not been healed of their disease physically speaking. Some preachers might even go as far as to tell people that you haven't been healed because your faith is not strong enough. I do not believe that.

In my reading this week, I came across a story about a man who was diagnosed with Parkinson's at around 50. He was a man of deep faith, and he said that he and his wife prayed every single day that he might be healed. 20 years later, at

the end stage of his life, he told his minister that his prayers have been answered. He said in all sincerity, "I have been healed, not of my Parkinson's disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson's, and it has allowed me to live my life with my wife to the fullest." The minister concluded that prayer does work, but it doesn't mean that we will automatically get what we pray for.

I have had so many conversations with people who have had significant health changes in their life, and they share how isolating that can be. They feel as though people are treating them differently. They feel people slowly moving away from them. Not sure how to talk with them or help them. So, the easiest thing to do is for them to kind of disappear. I've also had conversations with people who are suffering, who have shared stories of moments when they have felt at peace. When they have felt understood, heard, and loved. The woman who knelt at the feet of Jesus, in that moment was seen. Was loved, probably for the first time in a long time. To physically have touched another person. To know that they were not alone.

Beverly Zink-Sawyer points out that Jesus in this passage "makes it clear that those who are most deserving of our attention may be the least visible ones. Jesus, like the woman, transcends the invisible social and religious barriers to care for and love someone."¹ Jesus was famous for breaking those rules and breaking through the barriers. And that is what we, too, are called to do. The woman and Gyrus's daughter are held in the embrace of God's love. We too can feel that we are engaged in the practice of Sabbath rest, for Sabbath rest gives us an opportunity to know the presence of God. Sabbath practice can bring us healing and restoration. Redemption of the Spirit releases us and calls us away from the struggles of the heart. Get back to that sense of peace.

What these stories teach us is that God is always there for us, always has time for us. No matter what we face, we are not facing it alone. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians today, is teaching us that we too, as followers of Christ, are called to be there for others. Paul is calling us to excel in everything. "In faith, in speech, in knowledge. In utmost eagerness, and in our love for You, so that we want to excel also in this generous undertaking." Paul believes that our generosity is what shows that our love is genuine.

¹ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 187.

The passage from Mark ends with Jesus ordering the people who were present for the healing of Gyrus's daughter to not tell anyone about this, and also to give her something to eat. Why? Why would Jesus not want people to know what had happened? Wouldn't that help him to evangelize and bring more people to faith? I believe again that in this moment, Jesus is being a role model for us. Role modelling us to check our motivation. Jesus reached out and answered the call for help. Not because he had to. Not because it would bolster his reputation or increase his number in the polls. Jesus is teaching us the Gospel truth.

Motivation, and any generosity undertaken, happens when we understand that we give of our substance because we have, ourselves, been given to. God has given us what we have then to offer. It is not ours to hold in. Our faith can bring restoration to our lives, our spirituality, our emotions, our intellect, and our physical beings. God does this by giving us the rhythm of Sabbath practice. To help us each week bring our lives back into balance, bring us back into connection with God on a deep level. To rest is to bask in the presence of God. Being part of a faith community means that we are not alone automatically. If you are seeking peace, tranquility, understanding, restoration and wellness, then all you need to do is reach out in faith. Reach out to one another, reach out to God, trust that the Spirit is moving in each and every person, in this space and in the world. So don't be afraid. God goes before you always. Come and follow Jesus, and you will find rest for your soul. Thanks be to God.