September 6, 2020

Resting and Leaning on God

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Rev. Christina Thompson

After being freed from slavery in Egypt, the people of God needed a few basic things to survive their time in the wilderness.

Water was the first requirement, then food, and laws to guide them as a community. God, who had been present with them on their journey as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night--- provides these items for them.

God makes the bitter water sweet (Exodus 15:22-25) and provides water from a rock (Exodus 17:1-7). God gives them manna and quail to eat (Exodus 16:1-36). And God then gives them the laws to guide them as community in the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).

The 10 commandments guided their relationship with God – with commandments like “You shall have no other God’s beside me,” and their relationship with their neighbor—Do not covet your neighbor’s house. (Exodus 20:3, 17)

In these laws concerning their relationship with God, God provides them a gift for their souls—the call to rest.

*8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9For six days you shall labour and do all your work. 10But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Exodus 20: 8-11*

In a nutshell, God rested and so should we.

The things that God provides for the people of God show God’s provision as well as providing the things that we need to be whole people of God. Water, Food, ways to guide our relationship with each other and the space to rest and heal our souls.

Rest—acknowledges that our bodies were made to work and move and do the work that God calls us to do. But we were not made to work and move all the time. Our bodies need rest to restore, renew, heal and find the space for our souls.

So what is rest exactly?

The various definitions of Rest include—

* Sleep,
* Cease from action or motion
* Free from anxiety or disturbance
* In farmland—remain idle or uncropped.
* In music—space of silence.

So in our lives—rest is to stop from frantic pace and to cease from movement.

These definitions also remind us that rest must be deliberate like a farmer keeping a part of a field with no crops to let it recover.

Rest is important and should be part of our daily rhythm. But this call to rest, to find Sabbath is more than just stopping for stopping sake.

The Commandment is clear--- we rest, we stop and find sabbath because of who God is and because we are children of God. We were created by God, filled with God’s spirit, and called to live close to God. One of the ways we do this is to rest, stop and take Sabbath.

The 10 commandments give two reasons why we do this

In Exodus 20:11, it says we rest because God created for 6 days and rested on the 7th. So, we too should rest.

In Deuteronomy: 5:15 it says that we should keep the Sabbath because God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt and God has commanded you to keep the sabbath.

So we rest to follow the example of God—to rest as God rested and to remember what God has done for us.

So we rest not in our own selves and for our own purposes.

Rest in the biblical sense is not just putting our head on our pillow and sleeping.

It is curling up with God and finding rest for our souls.

Psalm 62 says this about where we find rest.

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;  my salvation comes from him.  
2Truly God is my rock and my salvation;  he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.* (Psalm 62:1-2)

So we find rest in God. When we find rest in God, we find one of those earlier definitions of rest--- to be free from anxiety or disturbance. Resting in God allows us to have peace of mind and spirit.

Peace comes as we rest in God--- as we lean upon God.

There is a song about that.

Leaning on the everlasting arms, written by Elisha Hoffman has been reminding us about leaning upon God since it was written in 1887.

What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Safe and secure from all alarms; Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
  
Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day,Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
What have I to dread, what have I to fear, Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,

Leaning on the everlasting arms and resting in God—in the arms of God. We do not have to only use our own strength, but to lean into the strength of Jesus.

I have blessed peace with the Lord so near, safe and secure from all alarms. Resting/leaning into the arms of God.

The question though is how do we do this? How do we rest, lean into God?

Follow the example of Jesus.

In our scripture reading, Jesus tells his disciples to “come away to a deserted place by yourself to rest.” Mark 6:31

The disciples had been very busy doing the work of God. They had been out and about preaching the word of God, casting out demons, anointed and cured the sick. They are tired and scripture says they have not even had time to eat. So they get into a boat and go to a deserted place by themselves. (Mark 6:32).

So how do we rest and lean into God?

We must follow this example of Jesus and find the spaces to get away to a deserted space and rest.

This is great advice, but just how do we do this? I don’t know about your house, but my house has not been deserted since March. It can do hard to find a space to be by yourself.

And even if we are able to find that deserted space to be by ourselves, often we carry the weight of the world into that space with us. We carry people, situations, struggles in our head.

We live in a noisy world--- even in this pandemic it feels like a constant stream of noise, news, social media, struggles of the world. It feels like one thing after another.

So how do we do this?---

Go to a quiet space and rest.

We can find all the excuses we want, but Jesus is very clear about the need to get away even for a little while.

So it maybe that we go into the bathroom and close the door, or find a small spot away from everyone else, creating our deserted spot where ever we can.

Sitting still even if just for a moment. Letting our thoughts come and go. We can hold something in our hands to help focus us—rock, cross, prayer beads.

Breathe in and out. Remembering that God created you and breathed into you your very breathe.

How often--- The 10 commandments say once a week.

Jesus says when you are tired.

But I have found that we must find this space of resting/leaning into God every day. We must find these quiet moments to keep ourselves from becoming tired and burnt out. It is hard though to actually remember to find those spaces in our day to rest. So one suggestion is to attach these moments of rest into things you already do.

* Fitbit/apple watch or the like that reminds you to move every hour. When that reminder comes up, first stop and breathe. Imagine that you are leaning into God. Then you can get up to get the rest of your hourly steps.
* Eat meals. Before a meal, stop, breathe, say a prayer of thanksgiving. After the meal, don’t just hop up from the table. Spend a few moments in quiet. When I was on retreat at St. Gertrude’s, I got a cup of tea after the meal and say and sipped it slowly, to deliberately make myself stop and rest for a few moments.
* Set a timer—or if you already have a timer that reminds you to do other things, like take medicine, use that same reminder to stop and rest.

We also need to find those longer periods of Sabbath--- once a week or so. We must find longer spaces where we do very little but just rest in God.

And then we need even longer stretches at least once a year, if not more often where we get away from it all--- vacation, space away--- just make sure you take God with you.

I wish this resting thing was easier. But there is always something getting in the way. I loved those spaces of sipping tea when I was on retreat, but I have stopped doing it now that I am back to my normal routine. Too much to do to stop and leisurely drink tea and rest with God.

Even those disciples --- they go away to that deserted place. But the people do not just follow them, they anticipate where they and Jesus are going and the crowds get there ahead of them. So much for resting.

The reality is that there will always be a to-do list, people who need us, demands of the world and the world is not going to ask us, “have you rested today?”

We have to make it a priority and make it happen. Because with rest, leaning on God, keeping Sabbath, we find rest and peace for our souls. We find freedom from anxiety. Without it—we become so tired and burnt out and unable to do the things we enjoy and the work God needs us to do.

Resting, stopping, leaning is so important to life, that God put it in the 10 commandments and blessed that space of rest. God blesses the Sabbath—space of rest.

So this week, make resting a priority--- even for a few moments.

Look at your calendar—mark off longer chunk of sabbath time.

Come away to a deserted place and rest awhile and may our souls rest in God.