

Enough.

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South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church

I always know when I've found my people. It's little things that give them away. Sometimes, someone will create a completely unnecessary spreadsheet, and I think, "there's one us." Or, a parent will call in November to find out the week of Vacation Bible School so she can get it on the calendar, and I think, "Yes! I get you." My people. One time, in my very first ministry calling, a 7th grade boy found my planner, and he actually called me on my cell phone because he knew I would be in a panic about it. He was one of us. You might be one of us if you have ever written something down on a list that you already did just to have the satisfaction of crossing it off.

And this is not bad. In a lot of ways, being organized is good. Working hard is good. The problem, for me, is that what is often underneath this façade of organization and planning and hard work is my desire to be in control, my innate need to be busy, to continually be striving to prove that I am valuable. That I am a productive, independent person who contributes to society as a whole. That I can do it all. And that I can do it all well. This is when I make my busyness and my hard work into an idol, when it begins to stop being healthy and good.

When I first started thinking about busyness as a sin, I thought, well, that's kind of a shallow topic. There are much bigger sins than not being able to properly engage in being a couch potato. But the more I thought about it on a grander scale, the more I realized that it's really not shallow at all, and that maybe, this is one of those sins that I prefer to recast as, like, an endearing flaw. A little quirk. It's kind of cute, right? Of course, doing that allows me to believe that it doesn't really matter, so I can just keep on doing it. I mean, it's not like all those other sins. I'm not hurting anyone.

Or am I?

The more I began to think and pray about it, the more I realized how insidiously harmful busyness really is. Too busy to listen, really listen to a friend or colleague who needs an attentive ear? Too busy to ask the question, listen to the answer, and then wait in the silence that follows for the real answer to spill out? Too busy to sit on the floor and do puzzles with my daughter while looking directly at the messy kitchen? Too busy to sit quietly with a grieving friend? That is too busy.

Outside of the obvious ramifications that busyness has on the people we love most, our busyness and fast pace of life has communal implications. Sarah Dylan Breuer, aptly observes this, "If we're not intentional about seeking the God of Israel as incarnated in Jesus, then our culture is only too happy to slip its own burdens on our shoulders -- all the pressure and anxiety of a life based around achievement and conformity to cultural ideals, an inheritance for our children that they start experiencing as their own as soon as they learn to read the worry on our faces."¹ Being a good student isn't enough. Everybody must be a leader. Also, athletic. Also, musical. Also, service-oriented. Also. Also. Also. Do more! Be more! And while some of our kids are thriving in this, a lot of them are shooting heroin up their arms or binge-drinking or engaging in unhealthy romantic relationships or disappearing into online worlds because they weren't made to live like this. It's not alright. And how about us adults? We're

¹ http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/06/proper_9_year_a.html

tired. We're so tired all the time, but we feel powerless to stop it, like busyness is its own machine, and we're just cogs in the wheel. We've even come to equate being busy with being valued. "How are you?" someone asks, and we reply, "Oh, I'm good. Busy." Wearing it like a badge of honor. Look at us. We are so busy! We are doing things! We are so important! But the truth is that we are weary and burdened, even if we're really good at looking like we're not. This is not even to mention the burden placed on people around the world by our frenetic lives and eager over-consumption that they entail.

The people Jesus is addressing in today's Gospel reading aren't dealing with the same cultural expectations that we are. Their problems were more about rigid religious rules than about creating the perfect American dream, but they were just as burdened by them as we are by ours. And they were, at their root, also about control. Like us, they were so consumed with maintaining the illusion of control and perfection that they couldn't see what was right in front of them. And then, in today's Gospel passage, Jesus comes in looks around at all the cultural expectations, and says very clearly:

ENOUGH.

He says it in a lot of ways, because, his community is a bit like ours in that they don't get it the first time. Or the second. Or, if history is any indication, the ten-thousandth.

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." In other words, John and Jesus have both invited us into something more meaningful than this. SLOW DOWN. Mourn. Weep. Play. Laugh. Dance. These are not things that are accomplished on a schedule, are they? But they are living. Really living. Deep-down soul living. And that doesn't happen when we're too busy to stop.

BUT. Here's the eternally difficult thing about talking about sabbath. When I'm tired, busy, worn-down and worn-out. When I think if somebody gives me one more thing to do, I'm going to lose my mind, the very last thing I want to hear is that I should rest. Like, REALLY? That just feels like another thing I have to do, and I can't. I cannot. Ok? I cannot do a single other thing. I do not have time to rest right now.

But what's at the root of that?

Is it pride? Is it a belief that if I stop for a minute, everything will fall apart? Or, worse, everyone will discover that I wasn't that important to begin with, because everything will go on? Both of ends of that spectrum sound an awful lot like egotism to me.

Is it that we don't believe we've earned the right to rest? I'll just do this one more thing, and then I'll be worthy of rest. Of course, God has never been concerned with whether we deserve anything. Jesus doesn't assess the crowd and say, "Ok, you've done enough, now you can sabbath. You need to work for a couple more days." He just says, "Come." Rest is a grace—something that God gives us because of who GOD is, not because of who we are. So hear me now—you are worthy of rest. You might not deserve it, I might not deserve it, but thankfully we serve a God who isn't interested in playing that game.

So, hear me say this: Rest anyway.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Have you seen a yoke? Because, I think to understand what Jesus is saying, we must know what a yoke is. A yoke is a piece of farming equipment used to attach two animals together so they could pull something heavy. So, Jesus doesn't mean that being a Christian isn't work. Being a Christian is work, and to pretend that it isn't would do a disservice to the gospel. But it's soul-filling work instead of soul-emptying work. It's not about perfection or fear or anger or any of those things that bring us down, and it includes time to stop DOING and just BE. We are free. God calls us to be radical lovers of the world who don't worry about cultural norms and instead get to be the hands and feet of Christ. Doesn't that sound SO MUCH BETTER than another item on your to-do list?

So, rest. Rest. Rest in the knowledge that you aren't God, and you aren't in control, and you are loved and valuable anyway.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, who I am convinced is a prophet for our time, says this:

"Resting in the sacred is a blessed break from the 'You deserve a break today' deep-fried culture of the self-obsessed. Sacred rest is a break from the am-I-productive-enough, lovable enough, safe enough, thin enough, rich enough, strong enough-worthiness system we live under. The sacred rest that is yours never comes from being worthy. It never comes through adopting the right kind and the right amount and the right quality of spiritual practices (although if those bring you a sense of well-being then by all means don't set them aside) the rest that is yours and mine comes from the promise of the Gospel: that Jesus came to save sinners, that Jesus came to heal and love and save the sin-sick and the over-functioning, that Jesus came to give rest to the weary, and the restless, to give rest to harried housewives and overworked social workers and mildly depressed executives."²

Rest.

It may have been obvious from the introduction I gave that this is not my area of spiritual strength, and I probably would not have chosen this particular passage from scripture. It's the lectionary text for today, the one that is prescribed. Of course, this is larger than a coincidence, isn't it? That I had to delve into a text that would challenge me to live into something better. I'm not the authority on rest. I'm just the messenger, and I'm working on it with you.

I know this one is hard. It is (can we be real for a minute?) especially hard in the wealthy Charlotte suburbs. It is hard for people who take pride in their achievements and like to work hard. And working hard isn't bad—in fact, it's a virtue! As long as we don't let our work and our busyness become an idol.

Rest.

It is a particular grace to live with a young child. They understand rest. Maybe not physical rest, so much, but they get it about savoring life. They know. It's why Jesus is always comparing his followers to children and why he talks in this passage about the people who know the truth being "infants."

I have this really vivid memory from when my daughter, Clara, was two years old. We lived in Richmond, then, and it snows in Richmond. But everything doesn't close, because they do not know how to winter properly. Things are open. Schools are open. People go to work! So there was a snow day. And her daycare wasn't open, but the church office was, and so I got to experience the particular joy that is

² <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/07/a-sermon-on-no-time-to-rest-and-also-no-jetpacks/>

working from home with a toddler. Does anybody know this life? Right, ok, so SABBATH and working from home with a toddler are contradiction in terms.

I was taking calls and answering emails and writing lessons and who knows what else while also limiting screen time because I was also trying to pass as an acceptable mother. And Clara walked over to the computer and took me by the hand and led me over to the sliding glass door that looked out into the backyard. And then she did that thing that children do where they lovingly push you down on the floor so you'll sit. And she sat down next to me, and in the sweetest little voice issued a command, "Look, mama! Look at the snow. Watch it with me for a minute. It's so beautiful, isn't it?" And right there, with toys all over the house and in the glow of my work laptop, we rested. We didn't deserve it. But it was right there all along, God's invitation into something better. A five-minute Sabbath. I almost missed it. I was so busy.

Listen to this paraphrase of Matthew 11: 28-30 from The Message:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."³

The unforced rhythms of grace. Maybe this is teaching us that we need to reframe what we mean by Sabbath, because we are probably not going to devote one day a week to resting. Maybe, instead, Sabbath is an attitude. A way of embracing the unforced rhythms of grace. An attentiveness to the beauty in the mundane. A way of encountering the world and understanding our place in it. A way of approaching the to-do list or perhaps even crafting it. Maybe Sabbath says that there is enough time if we hold on to what matters and let go of the rest. Maybe sabbath looks at the dirty kitchen and says "Tonight, we're going to ignore that, order pizza, and eat it on a blanket on the living room floor and laugh together." Maybe sabbath says to forget cleaning the bathrooms and go to the funeral. Maybe sabbath chooses to work in the garden instead of cleaning out the closet. Maybe a sabbath attitude even says no when I ask you to be on a committee because you are already stretched too thin.

Erin Wathen posits that sabbath rest is actually a family value. And she writes this, "The mandate to rest and restore is perhaps God's greatest gift to us. It is an invitation to remember and live into a holy purpose. In all its beautiful and life-giving simplicity, Sabbath-keeping is not just for our own good; it is a value that, when practiced faithfully, can transform the world."⁴

Amen.

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+11&version=MSG>

⁴ Wathen, Erin. More than Words: 10 Values for the Modern Family (Kindle Locations 681-683). Presbyterian Publishing. Kindle Edition.