

Scripture
Psalm 23
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Time to Restore

I took some much needed vacation at the end of June into early July. The weeks coming up to that week and a half off were enough to make me solidify that I was taking holidays. The first two days of my holidays I worked full days and then on the third day I headed out of town - the best decision so far. Every summer this scripture comes up and every summer I seem to resinate with it more.

I remember when I was an intern the Rev. Dan Chambers being my supervisor said to me "everyone says it slows down in the summer but I have not experienced it yet." I have learned his words are more than true. In some ways for us summer can ramp up. Oh sure there are fewer people sitting in the pews (or chairs in our case) but that does not mean we don't prepare worship the same or people don't get sick or fires and natural disasters don't happen. Often people have more time so they call more meetings or pop in more often. The rest of the staff are usually off and so extra work falls onto the minister plate. One person said to me the week before my holiday "how can you take off now - its the busiest time of the year." I realized that we have now come to a time when we say June and July are the busiest time of the year. Why is that? What is this addiction to doing and being busy? Is that what it is? With all that is happening in the world I think there is also an anxiety to not stop so that somehow we have the illusion that we are fixing something. I can be so guilty of this. If I just keep doing somehow I will in someday one day make everyone happy and then it will all be okay. I know how ridiculous that sounds and yet - over and over I fall into the trap. Am I alone.

On Monday I read a very helpful devotion. Emily Heath wrote "The Joyful River and the Road of Resistance" The scripture she focused on was Psalm 24 "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers." - Psalm 24:1-2

Heath wrote "On the Monday of the week when this country reached the point of literal children being held in literal cages at the US/Mexico border (or at least became aware of it), I found myself fly fishing on a river near another border: the Canadian one.

As I had driven north from my home, I passed a Border Patrol checkpoint on the interstate. Each southbound car was being pulled over and each passenger asked about their citizenship status. I drove on, knowing my driver's license and passport card were safely tucked into my wallet, and that I could pass by easily.

Standing in the river later that day, I felt the weight of privilege press in on me. I didn't have to worry about borders. I have not (yet) been threatened with my own cage. I had the means and resources to take a few days away from my work in order to do nothing more than fish. I would return to a comfortable home and the loving embrace of (for now) legally-recognized family.

I felt guilty that in a time when there is so much pain, I should have so much comfort. And yet, as I looked out at the river, rolling by me in a never-ending current, and at the trees and sky, and even at the beautiful colors of the rainbow trout I released back into icy-cold waters, I felt something else too: joy. God's creation is too beautiful to not appreciate when we see it, and too awe-inspiring to not be taken seriously as well.

So much of surviving in this difficult time depends on our ability to be able to sustain ourselves for the work yet to come. There is enough work to do to keep us occupied every minute of every day. And yet, if we burn out now, in the early innings, the powers of oppression and death will prevail well before the game is over.

By Wednesday morning I was back at the work of "resisting the powers of oppression and evil" as our baptismal vows read. I did my work with a renewed mind and body, and a spirit full of courage and faith. I'd like to think that I did better work for the fact I'd had a little rest and a little joy.

This will be a long journey of resistance. We are going to need everyone for every step of the way. Do the things that let you keep marching. Take the trip. Take the nap. Take pleasure in the joyful things you love. They will help you to keep going, and they will remind you that God is always with us, on the seas, on the rivers, and everywhere.

Prayer

God, in the midst of the toughest days, may I still find glimpses of joy. Amen.”¹

I completely understand Emily's struggle, it is always hard to go away. I don't do it often because of the guilt I carry for doing so. People I care deeply about have gone through tragic things, even death while I have been on a holiday and yet if I am not living into fullness of life how can I expect others too? I find the politics of today heavy on my heart daily, rarely do the politics of the world bring me to tears but lately they have more than once. Macky always finds it very hard to go away because he doesn't receive a paycheck when he does - that is a big deal for our family. The means he only took three days off in total and even he received pressure from work to not do it. And yet at the end of our mini break on the Oregon coast he said "that wasn't

¹ Heath, Emily http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_the_joyful_river_and_the_road_of_resistance?utm_campaign=dd_jul14_18&utm_medium=email&utm_source=unitedchurchofchrist

long enough, we need to do this more often.” I came back to work the next week and at least four people said - you look great... rest, healing, renewal, pause, breathe...

The Rev. Canon David Lovelace wrote "Come away to a place where there are no cell phones, your iPad will not work, a place where you can rest and be recharged." An attractive sounding invitation in the midst of our fast-paced, over-scheduled, information-filled days. Our busyness seems to preclude time for family meals, in-depth conversation with friends, times to just sit still for a few minutes in the silence. We seem to enjoy the hectic pace of our lives ... Our culture supposes that activity and accomplishment are better than rest. We identify ourselves to one another most often by what we do rather than who we are. I find myself easily slipping into a rhythm of activity that allows little time for refreshment of body and soul. Sabbath, meaning literally "to cease," is a gift that invites us to step away from our over scheduled, busy lives and experience rest. An invitation to escape to a place apart where one can find Sabbath is enticing.”²

Jesus and his disciples in the gospel of Mark live very busy lives, travelling, teaching, healing, feeding, and more. People flocking to receive. That is why they are looking for rest. Jesus needs rest, the disciples need rest. They need ‘to cease’ to sabbath. Jesus show great wisdom in this command to rest. The rhythm of work and rest seems to help us human beings function better and feel better about ourselves. A study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology confirms people, regardless of income, working hours, profession or age feel better mentally and physically when they take time off from their labours. Time off provides critical opportunities for bonding, exploring other interests and relaxation. The invitation of Jesus to his disciples to retire to a place where they can rest, take a deep breath, bond with one another and share in telling their stories is important for their well-being.

I will never forget in a particularly difficult time of life when I sat with a pastor and friend and he said to me this is what the Psalm means when it says ‘He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.’”

There is so much happening in our world, in our lives and in our congregation and yet it is time for us to remember the sabbath. It can be hard to take a day off but we will be more whole as individuals as families and as church when we remember to do so. But what do we do - how do we restore. So often in our lives these days especially in Squamish it is about doing more, being more. As a competitive athlete myself I get the drive to go and do more to become more but I have learned a harsh truth along the way. If everything is about doing, being, accomplishing more physically and we never feed our soul we will run dry.

If we miss the feeding of the soul that Jesus engaged in we short change ourselves and the hungry crowd in which we might be trying to feed. The world problems we are trying to solve. Just as I am aware of the large number of people without adequate food, I am deeply aware of the multitudes who hunger in their souls for meaning and peace. Many are those who wonder "Why am I here?" or "What should I do with my life?" "Does anyone love me?" "What will

² http://day1.org/3944-an_invitation_you_will_not_want_to_refuse

become of me?" These questions are expressions of the soul's hunger. It was to feed this hunger that led Jesus to "teach them many things" even before He gave them loaves and fish for their bodily hunger.

I have had a lot of conversations lately with parents sharing how their children are experiencing anxiety. I have little doubt that there are some clear reasons for the anxiety, depression epidemic our world is facing today. Not to ignore chemical imbalance and of course depression and mental health disease, there is no question that this exists for many. The epidemic however has been enhanced by our busyness. Not being able to stop and slow down and even when we do it is another task or goal on the plate. When I try to go for a workout or on the dragon boat I used to be still accessible all the time. I would get texts, emails and phone calls. It has been a long time since I haven't actually done a little bit of work on a day off because that is what society expects of us. News that need not be news is shared rather than just dealt with in the moment by whomever is on the other side of the text, phone call or email. That often means we also don't take time to nourish our souls. "Those with little money are often the ones suffering bodily hunger. Ironically, it is often those with money who suffer the most from the soul's hunger. "I have all this, but what does it mean? I am successful in my business or profession, but does all this time and effort count for anything? Who would love me if they really knew my inner thoughts and actions that I hide from the public eye?"³

If we don't spend anytime in leaning and devotion we will forget that we are not alone. That we are loved despite our inner thoughts and pondering. Every relationship has to be worked on and it takes time. I hope you take time daily to be nourished by the one who forgives us when we stumble and fall flat in attempting to walk the straight path. In this season of pause for many things take time to pause and be restored in holy presence and wholeness. Know that you are not alone. Find the quiet centre in the crowded life you lead because the holy longs for us to be whole.

Amen.

³ http://day1.org/6699-feeding_the_souls_hunger