

“Rest as Resistance”
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
The Rev. Leah Reed
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I’ve seen this meme floating around social media lately—maybe you’ve seen this pop up on your Facebook feed too. It’s a picture of one of these roadside signs with interchangeable letters that many businesses and churches have. And it reads, “Can someone unplug the United States of America and plug it back in?” My answer to almost anything tech related is just this. Is my iPhone frozen? Turn it off. Netflix is glitching? Let’s exit out of the app and restart it. Is the wifi down? Restart the router. Because almost anything will work again if you unplug it, wait a couple seconds or minutes, and plug it back in. Are humans really that different?

A few years ago, I was having lunch with a colleague in ministry, we’ll call her Rachel for the purposes of this story. She was a children’s minister, and had just gotten home from a week-long camp, followed by VBS, and she sat in front of me at the table and she was just depleted. Some of you might know that I was in children’s and youth ministry before coming to First Baptist, and I remember that bone-chilling tired that set in the day you returned home from camp or the day you finished VBS. Aint no tired like VBS tired. I remember Rachel telling me she was headed out of town on vacation, and before she left, she confided in her pastor letting him know in an off-hand comment that she was really looking forward to being away. He said to her, “Rachel, if you loved it, you wouldn’t be tired, and you wouldn’t want a vacation from it, so you need to think about that.” Needless to say, she left that church, and remarkably she’s still in ministry today. But, where does this idea come from that if you really love something, if you really feel called to do something, if your intentions are truly in the right place, if, if, if...you wouldn’t need or want to rest.

In the sixth chapter of Mark we get this account of Jesus and his disciples doing what they have been known to do—traveling to a new

town, seeing droves of people in desperate need, and then responding to those needs. In fact, this story seems almost inconsequential, when you read the more-lengthy accounts that we find in Mark that detail these extravagant miracles performed by Jesus—the feeding of the five thousand and walking on water. This scene seems almost transitional, the disciples are coming home after some of their first initial ministry efforts that don't go quite as planned. They're coming home, I can imagine them sitting in the grass surrounding Jesus, reporting back to him all that they had seen and taught and done. And Jesus looks at them and just sees their exhaustion. He sees that they have been running themselves ragged. They probably have that glazed-over look that newborn parents have. He knows that they need to lie down. He tells them to come to a deserted place all by themselves to rest a while. And then the text says this, “for many were coming and going and they had no leisure to even eat.” Mark calls eating a leisure! Eating, like the thing that we do a few times a day that keeps us all alive.

Karen Marie Yust says, “Is this not a succinct description of the lives of many people today? Too busy to pause for a real lunch, young professionals munch on vending-machine fare while working at their desks. Teens grab a bagel for breakfast on the way out the door to school. Parents and children drive through a succession of fast food restaurants between after school lessons and sports practices.

Commuters sip double lattes on the early morning drive, gnaw on baby carrots between meetings, and pick up take-out on the way home.

Toddler graze on cereal pieces and other portable finger foods so that meal schedules need not control the timing of family shopping trips. We are a people besieged by activities and responsibilities that reshape even basic functions of life such as eating.” Now, this is not to shame anyone that sees themselves in every single sentence of that quote! Several days a week I eat lunch in the car on the way to pick up my son from camp, or hurriedly at my desk while I'm answering emails. This is the reality of life that many of us find ourselves in, and if you cannot relate to this feeling of “go, go, go”, I'm sure you can remember a time in your life that was filled to the brim. If you're not in it now, we have all been

there. What does this passage mean for those of us for whom rest sounds like a luxury that is an impossible feat?

Barbara Brown Taylor's book, "An Altar in the World," is a beautifully written account of what it means to discover the sacred in the small things we do and see every day in our life. In reading this book there's a chapter that I keep coming back to when I need a refresher, and it's called, "The practice of saying no." In this chapter she names the busyness of her own life, and how she's learned the lost art of hearing Jesus' invitation, giving ourselves permission to rest and to claim the Sabbath time God give us. And if we cannot seem to rest or carve away time for sabbath, she asks the broader question of what THAT means. If we can't seem to rest from our work, what are we saying about ourselves? What are we saying about God? Are we trying to earn our salvation? Do we think that staying busy somehow endears us to God? Does it get us more points with our creator? Does it make us a better person? She also notes that in China, the polite answer to the question of "How are you?" is to say, "I am very busy, thank you." No matter where you live, for many this IS the measure of success. Right here in America, business is the water we all swim in. We glamorize overworking like it's some sort of marker for caring. Remember Rachel? Recently, I've been deeply inspired by the work of the nap ministry, an organization that I learned about through instagram. The nap ministry was founded in 2016 by Tricia Hersey in Atlanta, Georgia. This ministry provides a framework and practice for engaging with the power of performance art, site-specific installations, and community organizing to install sacred and safe spaces for the community to rest together. They facilitate and curate performance art that examines rest as a radical tool for community healing. They offer collective napping experiences, immersive workshops, lectures and coaching. Their founder Tricia says, "This is about more than naps. This is about more than naps. This is about more than naps. My rest as a Black woman in America suffering from generational exhaustion and racial trauma always was a political refusal and social justice uprising within my body. I took to rest and naps and slowing down as a way to save my life, resist the systems telling me to do more, and most importantly as a remembrance to my

Ancestors who had their DreamSpace stolen from them. This is about more than naps. It is not about fluffy pillows, expensive sheets, silk sleep masks or any other external, frivolous, consumerist gimmick. It is about a deep unraveling from white supremacy and capitalism. These two systems are violent and evil. History tells us this and our present living shows this. Rest pushes back and disrupts a system that views human bodies as a tool for production and labor. It is a counter narrative. We know that we are not machines.”

The concept of rest has been individualized and privatized. But how can we practice something different in the context of community? In its community form, this concept of Sabbath is not only about rest but it’s also about resistance. When the word sabbath appears in the Torah, the commandment limits the exploitation of others as well as the exhaustion of the self. By interrupting this socially sanctioned social order every week, the concept of rest and sabbath suspends our ways of dominating each other on a regular basis.

This makes me think about medical professionals during the height of covid. Makeshift morgues, isolation from friends and family, lack of PPE, open hostility towards medical advice, and non-stop exposure to death. Literally putting their lives on the line every single day for months and months. I can imagine them trying to steal away for a precious minute to do something leisurely like eating a snack, or perhaps taking a 15-minute break. This is a reality for so many that see themselves or are perceived by others as essential to the survival of their community. There are so many who carry the weight of someone else’s needs—teachers, therapists, pastors, doctors and nurses, social workers, leaders, community organizers. For those in the medical community on the front lines of covid, this was not a perception—they had the very real weight of healing on their shoulders. They were keeping the flood gates of covid under control. So, for many the quote from Jesus in Mark 6 seems like an unattainable illusion. The rallying cry for “self care” is almost offensive in the absence of community care. We cannot be told to rest, and simultaneously be given no resources to help us practice sabbath. It’s like encouraging a full-time caregiver to “take a night off,”

when no one offers to cook, clean, or care for their loved on in that night off. It's not possible!

I remember hearing about a woman in another congregation who lost her husband after 40 years of marriage. Her eight brothers and sisters flew in from all over the country to sit with her in her grief. She was tended to like a newborn baby. They made her grits in the morning, paid her bills, received casserole dishes at the front door, they camped out on couches and made pallets in the basement. If she needed anything, it was there in a second. This is rest in sacred community.

When we are able to stand in the gaps and when we decide to be relentless in our support of one another, we find God.

Friends, we need the cool grass between our toes, the blue sky overhead, the rest underneath a tree, and a Jesus who listens to us. Accepting Jesus' invitation may not be so clean as floating on a boat on the open sea, far from all the things we wish to escape. But, like the disciples, we are not able to give from a place that's empty. We are not able to be fully present to our families, our work, our friendships, our health, our lives, unless we can take the time to nourish our souls.

When I first read this passage, if I'm honest, I was a little annoyed with Jesus—sometimes that happens. Come on, Jesus! Why are you telling the disciples, your followers, who desperately try to follow in your footsteps and mimic your every move, why are you telling them to rest, and then you're going out and working? Why aren't you napping with them? They need to see you rest! What could have happened if Jesus rested alongside the disciples? Why did he have to have a "do as I say, not as I do" moment? I wanted Jesus to rest, simply for the precedent it could have set for the disciples. And, because we all know that two opposite things can be true at the same time. Ultimately, I'm glad Jesus doesn't rest, because that means that all of us can. Amen.