**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**July 25th, 2021**

**Escaping to Restoration**

1. Jesus Napped

The text we hear from the New Testament is the bread in the sandwich of the loaves and fishes text. It points to our Savior who is trying to just get away for a bit, to have a rest, to restore himself as well as his friends, the disciples. And you can tell they are having a hard time seeking sabbath – they go in a boat and they try to get to this deserted place. Yet the crowd sees Jesus, they know about his miracles, and they want to be near him. Jesus has compassion upon them, just as any gentle shepherd would, but in some ways I feel bad for Jesus, because the man needs a break.

And he isn’t taking a break that is meaningless, no, this need for rest is deeply embedded in the Jewish understanding of keeping the sabbath, taking time out to seek God, and reserving the day to rest.

I’ve been thinking more about Sabbath lately in light of how difficult it was for Jesus to take that Sabbath break. Before I go to bed at night, I’ve been watching a Netflix series called, ‘This Unorthodox Life’ which follows a real family who left Jewish fundamentalism and are now living an elite life in fashion in Manhattan. I don’t know if I would recommend the show, but in parts of the show, you get to see the family keeping Sabbath. And they take Sabbath seriously – they do not go shopping, they do not turn on and off power, but their main purpose for that time is to read and sing the prayers of the people and connect with God.

This dedication of the Sabbath makes me think about other religions and their forms of rest. Those who worship Allah will pray five times a day – at sunrise, at noontime, in the afternoon, at sunset, and at night. I’ve always marveled at the dedication to prayer, where nothing seems to get in the way of these sacred times. I’ve been at airports and gone past the chapel and I’ll peek in, and often times you will see Muslims in prayer. When I worked at the hospital and passed the chapel window, you would often see someone with a prayer mat.

For me, whether or not I believe in what someone else believes is somewhat beside the point – it’s that dedication that brings me to a place of awe. What if we looked at Jesus, seeing his need to get away and pray, and took the Sabbath seriously? It sounds accusatory to say, but it is not my intention – but where did we, in our Protestant Christian life, lose that intensity or wonder or awe about Sabbath and how Sabbath can change our lives? Where did we get derailed?

And rather than seeking blame or point fingers at places in Christian history, I think texts like this invite us again and again to Sabbath rest. For me, there’s something incredibly comforting about the fact that Jesus, the Savior of the World, the Messiah of all mankind, perfect in every way – needed to take a break, needed to take a nap, and needed to step away. If our Savior in this passage, and other passages within the Gospels, point to those moments of stepping away, there is a beautiful invitation before us. Today, let us hear Christ call us by name, saying, ‘Come away with me to a deserted place.’ Come away, restore, renew, and then go out into the world again, but first – rest.

1. 7 Kinds of Rest

A dear friend of mine recently told me that there are seven kinds of rest. I’ll be honest and

say that I really just thought there were one, or maybe two, kinds of rest – one where you sleep, or maybe one where you meditate. Yet a strong woman, Dr. Saundra Dalton Smith, who is a physician and researcher, wrote a book called ‘Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, and Restore Your Sanity.’

The seven kinds of rest are mental, sensory, creative, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical. In mental rest, you are giving your brain a break from thinking or constructing ideas. In sensory rest, you unplug all the technology and get rid of outside distractions. In creative rest, you do something you find beautiful and meaningful. In emotional rest, you process your emotions and seek to release the tension. Social rest is spending time by yourself, taking a break from engaging in human conversation. In Spiritual Rest, you connect with something beyond yourself, for us, that would be God, but for others it is an acknowledgement that something bigger than yourself holds you here. And Physical rest is as it sounds – napping or sleeping to give your body a chance to recover.

All of these kinds of rest seem like an important part of a well lived life, one that is more authentic and joyful and able to engage in the call that God has placed upon each of our hearts. None of the kinds of rest that Dr. Smith points to feel selfish or pointless or meaningless – no, it points us to a rest that is restorative, renewing, and each kind of rest can be an important part of our overall Sabbath rest.

1. Pandemic busyness

As we come out of the confines of Pandemic life, we are overjoyed to be able to spend time

together and reconnect and do those things that we’ve wanted to do for months. It is a gift to be able to enjoy time together, to have conversations, without this looming risk and scary news conferences pushing our souls deeper into a sense of confusion and fearfulness.

But. But I wonder if we are responding to this new sense of freedom in the healthiest way. I’ve seen, and I’ll say I’ve seen it in myself as well, this sense that we need to catch up on 15 months of life. What an enormous, incredible, and impractical ask of ourselves. We can’t catch up, we can’t fill our days to the brim with being busy and jump right into life again with every distraction around every corner. The pandemic was painful, but what if it taught us the beauty of slowing down, and what if we are still called to slow down here in post-pandemic life? What if the Pandemic taught us the value of rest, the value of solitude, and the value of reconstructing what our true priorities are, especially when our lives are on the line.

In other words, maybe it’s time to look at your calendar and scratch out some of those busy times and write ‘SABBATH’ in bold capital letters. Think about what kind of rest you need – in this passage, it seems that Jesus needs a social rest, maybe physical and spiritual too, and when he feels that in his soul, he listens, and he seeks to do just that. Though in this passage he was not able to really get the rest he needs, we still see the value and importance of it.

What do you need today or in the days and weeks ahead? Do you need to get away to a deserted place? Some of you have had the chance to go hiking or traveling and rest in the grandeur and beauty of God’s creation. You’ve had the chance to see both the sunrise and sunset and where God is working beautifully in the acts of creation. Maybe your rest looks like sinking into a chair and reading a book, taking away the outside distractions and pressures and really letting yourself fall into the pages. Perhaps you need physical rest, and instead of telling your body ‘no, I’m too busy’ will you tell your body ‘yes, I hear that you need rest, so I will slow down.’

Summer offers us a unique opportunity outside of the academic year to bask in creation and to reassess our need for sabbath and then act on the call. May we listen to our bodies and souls, just as our Savior did, and be brave enough, dedicated enough, and love ourselves enough to seek the rest we need in order to live into the authentic and beautiful life that God is calling us to here today. Amen.