

Come Away with Me

A painter was hired to paint the exterior of a church. His practice was to thin the paint so that he could make a larger profit. As he was right in the middle of painting the church a torrential rain began to fall and it washed all of the paint off. Then, as quickly as the rain began, it ended and the sun came out. As the painter gazed skyward, he heard a voice from above saying: “Repaint! Go and thin no more!”

I tell this joke this morning not only because I think its’ kind of cute, but also because it speaks about something that takes up a large portion of our lives..work. Work is necessary, important and it certainly can be fulfilling and enjoyable, like my job is, but it can also be very frustrating, draining and consuming. Like our friend the painter, for instance, who is so driven to make more money that he will forgo his conscience and thin the paint out not caring about the poor quality of the job, just so long as he makes a good dollar. It is so easy to become consumed by your work and it happens to many, many people around the world.

Every so often a commercial slogan comes along that is very good at getting into your head and saying there. Here are some oldies but goodies. Maxwell House – good to the last drop. Kentucky Fried Chicken – finger licking good. Ford Motor company – built Ford tough. And for those of you who are old enough to know what bryl cream is, how about “a little dab’l do ya? Or how about McDonald’s – you deserve a break today?

All those slogans were successful because they follow all the rules of effective advertising. They are directed to the consumer and the McDonald’s slogan is especially effective because the word “deserve” in “you deserve a break today” helps the customer to avoid any feelings of guilt they may have about spending money in order to eat there. We deserve a break today.

When I looked over the readings for today, one item jumped out at me. I was in the middle of getting ready for another congregational meeting on redevelopment, I was trying to get all the bulletins together because soon I will be on vacation, and I was trying to pull a wedding and a memorial service together before I leave.

So when I looked at the scripture for today, I thought, “I am physically and mentally tired, and maybe I should look for a different theme because I don’t want to preach to myself.”

But then I thought, Maybe this is something that a lot of us need to hear.”

Studies are being done on typical North American families and the results, according to one researcher, were what he described as “disheartening”. We are so consumed with working, collecting, amassing and generally getting ahead, we actually spend very little time enjoying what we are working for. We are so consumed with work and the various activities we are involved with, we often get swept along in the rush.

And into all that hustle and bustle of our daily lives and into the midst of being consumed by work and worries, Jesus utters to us a beautiful word...”rest.” No wonder one of the most beloved verses in the entire Bible is Matthew 11:28, which says “Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

And speaking of being busy and weary, today in our gospel lesson we discover that the disciples were very busy. They had been roaming the countryside proclaiming the gospel, calling for repentance, anointing the sick and casting out demons. They are very excited to tell Jesus about all that they had been doing and teaching.

And what does Jesus do? Recognizing how busy they have been and sensing their excitement and passion, he says to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

We are all familiar with the commandment to “Keep the Sabbath Holy” and we know that it is a day of rest. But think for a moment about how the Israelites felt when Moses read them this commandment. This would have been unbelievably good news to people who were recently slaves...who’s time was never their own and who never, ever had a guaranteed period of rest. “Wait a minute” I imagine them saying, “you mean we get to rest? We even **have** to rest? “Glory Hallelujah!”

I have a feeling that more and more of us find ourselves in a place not all that different from Egypt where the ancient Hebrews existed. Except our slavery is self-constructed, self-imposed, and so its more difficult to see it or overcome it.

We are enslaved to ideas about our children having every opportunity possible, and therefore schedule them into busy lives. We are enslaved to the belief that the only thing that will bring contentment is more...more money, more space in our homes, more cars, more things to put on our resumes or in our closets....more. And all of those levels of wanting, don’t allow much time for anything but work.

In light of all of this, listen again to Jesus’ simple invitation to “come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.” This is not just an invitation to take an

afternoon off or go on vacation, though those are important things. This is an invitation to loosen our shackles and climb out of the cages we've made from a culture that says that more is the ticket to happiness and that work is the ticket to more.

Now hear the opening verse of Psalm 23 in its King James Version we are so familiar with. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." A lot of people tend to focus on the powerful imagery of the first half of the verse, "The Lord is my shepherd." But that imagery just doesn't make sense apart from the second half of the verse.

Because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Because I trust God for my good, I shall not cave in to the loud noise of my culture enticing me to want and want and want at every turn and corner of my life.

Because God has promised to take care of me, I will not let work and the accumulation of stuff overcome me so that I can rest.

That's the key thing about Sabbath rest...it invites a change to step back and stand apart from all the things that usually drive and consume us.

Here's another joke for you. A man named Bill was sitting on a bench when he was joined by a boy about 10 years old. Bill noticed that the boy was eating candy...lots of it. He was eating twizzlers, M&Ms, and Skittles, one after another. Bill couldn't stand it anymore, he had to say something, so he turned to the boy and said, "You know, eating that much candy is bad for your health." The boy looked at Bill and said, "Did you know that my grandfather is 104 years old?" Bill said, "I bet he didn't eat very much junk food." The boy responded, "No, he always minded his own business!"

Finding the rest that God wants us to enjoy is hard to do. No wonder the Psalmist says quite honestly that God didn't simply invite rest but instead confesses that God **makes** me like down in green pastures".

We are a people that need rest yet we resist it and so God commands it. God is like Bill in our joke, God notices our bad habits and God wants to be in the midst of our business...God wants us to enjoy the rest that we so desperately need. Not resting **just** to rest, but resting so that we can feel God's presence and blessing, experience a sense of contentment, and give thanks....exactly what we are doing today.

Because in moments of rest, we are more able and likely to pray....we are more likely to appreciate....more likely to love and to be who God created us to be. Finding rest in the midst of worship is a beautiful thing...you can rest your head against the very shoulder

of God and you can close your eyes and just...be. Rest in the presence of the one who created you, who redeemed you and who poured out the Spirit upon you.

Coming together as a community to worship is most definitely rest but there are other ways and other days to find rest. So, my siblings in the faith, on this day, as a person who holds a degree in Christian Education, I am going to give you some homework.

Are you ready? I challenge you and I urge you this week to pick one thing that you **will not do**.

Maybe it will be in the evening when you will turn the TV or the computer or the phone off. Maybe you can take one thing off of your appointment book. Whatever it is, spend that time in rest, doing whatever you feel like doing. Spend it taking a walk, playing a game, reading a good, chatting with a family member or a friend.

And, in whatever way you decide to rest, take a moment to give thanks to God. Give God thanks because you shall not want. Give God thanks that as you lie down in green pastures or sit beside still waters, God is there with you. Give God thanks because God restores your soul. Give God thanks, that because of God's grace, your cup overflows.

And, when you do this, your life that so often feels stretched and thin, like watered down paint, will be thickened and enriched because the love you receive from our Shepherd will never wash off. Amen.