

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Called to Rest"
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It takes a while for many of us to realize that human beings are not designed to operate at high energy levels 18 hours a day, seven days a week. We are not designed to go through all four seasons of the year at the same break neck pace, albeit some for work, some for recreation. We are designed for cycles of work and rest, of exertion and relaxation, of highs and lows.

All of us know we can get out of whack. We go on with the same apparent energy as the toddler or two year old who wants to squeeze every drop of life out of every waking moment. Perhaps these toddlers take after one or more of their parents or ancestors.

We think we should be able to do more than we can, but all of us, no matter what stage of life are becoming more and more alert to the fact that we have limitations. This is good. We are not God. We are not superman or superwoman, not matter what others think about us.

This does not mean we cannot exert ourselves at all, or that we should be doing nothing more often. Some of us may be called to simply listen. I know I don't listen enough. I often fear the silence, and some of the insights that may come if I quiet myself enough to listen. This is not good. I not only need to hear the bird sounds outside, now that it is summer, I need to feel the sunshine on my face, I need to remember this is the only body I have to look after, and I would be wise to heed its needs, my needs, you too with yours.

So we come into the quieter season, Summertime, and the jazz melody with that name comes into my mind. This season tends to be our time for rest and outdoor recreation where we simply marvel at creation. And we trust the Lord for not simply marveling at the bad weather, no, we marvel at the sustenance that comes from the earth, the beauty and the colours, the fresh air and the sounds of surf, wind and fireworks.

Boom. I'm not sure why I am often distracted when I make the inner discipline to listen, to rest, to calm myself. Distraction seems to be one of my major suits. Whether it is flies or mosquitoes, sounds or internal lists of

things to get down around the house, people to see around the community, or simply someone coming to the door while I am writing this sermon, which is fine; I am distracted. I excel, most of us excel at what is now called multi-tasking, that is, having several activities going on at once in our minds and schedules. Sometimes during the service, my mind goes elsewhere, does that every happen to you? It's one thing if you are out there and that happens, it's another thing if you're up here and that happens.

So quieting myself and resting (without napping or sleeping, which also fine throughout the summer and other parts of life), quieting myself and resting is a challenge. I would rather have the audio and audio-visual input constantly on. Technically, this audio and audio-visual input is also constantly on in our unconscious state as well, although scientists have not figured out all the reasons for our dreaming, our REM sleep certainly keeps us sane.

So as we begin to take in July and August, the summer months almost everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere, we can shamelessly, wonderfully rest. Some of us will work, perhaps at slightly lower speed. Some of us will jam as many activities as we can plan into our lives. But most of us, at least I am talking about myself to a large degree now, need to slow down, listen, rest, do some gardening. Even just taking a few measured breaths, in, out, in out, in out, does some good.

Jesus brings us to a place of rest as well. He was reviewing the most recent Angus-Reid survey and polling that had been taken about what people were thinking about his cousin John and him. He realized that John came as many prophets did, fasting and ascetic, that is, denying himself pleasures and eating very little. Surveys indicated John was too austere and some thought he was demon possessed. On the other hands, pollsters found that people felt Jesus was too much into parties, and hung out with sinners too often, thereby getting the rep of being a party boy, eating and drinking too much.

People often get the wrong idea by a very small amount of information, and in John's and Jesus' case, they were missing the very program of God. Jesus switches at this point in the gospel of Matthew from surveys to prayer. He thanks God the Father for allowing infants to experience life without these meta-life critical attitudes, rather just taking life in. He doesn't advocate returning to babyish or childish attitudes, but rather the wonder of life, and the cycles of life.

He emphasizes the first and most important element being relationship with Jesus. He then gives the beast of burden picture for how we treat ourselves. We (and/or those closest to us) hang heavy yokes on ourselves and think that this is what life is all about. "If I just work hard enough, or if I just raise the children in a certain way, and they turn out in a certain way..."

"If I am just good enough, or courageous enough, or smart enough...I will make life the best it can be." But the yoke gets heavier and heavier as life goes on and one day we ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this to myself?"

The "whys" can be difficult questions. We may or may not find out why we put yokes on, or why we allowed others to put them on us. But meanwhile, there they are. It's not that wearing a yoke as a beast of burden is out of character. The yoke is the way the work gets done. In the ancient world, there was no machinery to get it done. So the animal got it done, with the direction of the human. The yoke is a picture of our work, whether top executive, minimum wage worker, brilliant scientist, garbage collector, top athlete, single parent or anybody else. It is what's around our neck defining us.

Now Jesus issues an invitation. He invites us to take off that yoke. He invites us to feel the lightness. He does not leave us with no work, no direction, no yoke at all. But rather he places his own on us, which mainly reminds us of his love, patience, grace and mercy; all attributes that he wants us to give away to others.

Jesus is not a cruel master, nor a sadistic sultan. He does not force his ways on us. He does not violate us with all kinds of random rules. Rather, he invites us to know him and his ways, gentle, humble, serving ways. He knows we are tired and need rest. He knows that part of the cycle where we need to be rejuvenated but don't know how to do it, regardless of our money, time, power, health or anything else.

He knows what we need. He invites us to listen, to follow him; to rest. That is his call on this occasion. This is desperately needed in our day where we think the next toy will bring satisfaction, the next relationship will bring peace. It is back to our Creator, listening to creation speak about all that Jesus wants to be and do in us.

It is good to be called to rest. I know that our final rest will come and we will be with the Lord forever. Meanwhile we enjoy tastes of that final rest as we rest in Jesus, listen to his voice, take in his love.

Let us pray.