

A Time for Rest
Lake Street Church of Evanston
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September 1, 2019

I remember the first time I fell asleep on the floor – I didn't use to sleep on the floor, but ever since Zosia came along, I can go to sleep in about a minute flat. I also take naps. I like naps. It's a sort of confessional to admit that you take naps. After having spent a huge portion of my life in Cambridge, MA, and now in the high-achieving North Shore, I know that you're not supposed to admit that you take naps, but naps are awesome. I love sleep. I always have. But you're supposed to pretend that you don't take naps, because you're so busy, because busy is a status symbol usually. It means that people value your time and there's not enough of it. But, let's be real, naps are amazing. Coffee naps are even better. Have a cup of coffee before your nap, go to sleep, wake up 30 minutes later when the caffeine kicks in. It's heavenly. But when did rest become something that we don't talk about. I think we used to be better as a culture talking about rest.

And labor day weekend is a heck of time for a good nap, but you didn't sleep in on Sunday, and I'm thankful for that, but I want to remind you that a nap is a good idea on labor day weekend. And in fact, rest is important for functioning and for being human. In fact, a commitment to rest is a theological commitment as we see from some of our texts this morning. I love the text especially from the Reform prayer book for Jews, which links the rest of the Sabbath as a point of connection to the Holy in a profound way. I also love that they added so many women to the traditional prayer in an act of inclusion. In the Holy Quran, the night is specifically named as being created for rest from our labors.

So, how do we go about reclaiming some space for rest, and how do we go about doing it when there seems like so much work to do?

I think to begin with we have to admit that rest is a vital part of the work that people of faith are called to in this world. Folks, burnout amongst caring professions, and not specifically care-giving professions is at an all time high. This is especially true in the clergy, where ministers are not exactly the best models for carving out space to rest, recharge, and be themselves. Heck, I'm not the best model for that either, even though I'm far from the mainline Protestant endeavor to be a "quivering mass of availability" that Stanley Hauerwas accused most of us of being. But if we think that we've been called to some important work in the world, it is vital that we take care to actually be in a place to do it for the long haul. That means taking some time to connect with why we do what we do in the first place. That extends to every single person who feels like they were put on this earth for a purpose, even if they are trying to figure out what that purpose is in their lives. So, if you want to be a force for healing in the world, if you want to put the world back together again, or at least your little corner of the world, then you have to be able to do that work. You have to be a person, and that means practicing some

self-care, even when it's hard and you feel like no one else is and you'll get too far behind and people will judge you for it.

But rest also connects us to the why of what we are up to in the world. Without some time to stop and think we experience time and our actions as an unending wave of sensation, and we struggle to attach meaning to what we do. Rest allows us time for reflection on what we do and why. Without it, you may wind up experiencing your time as more about to-do lists than about the great thing you are assembling your life around. It also helps us to set priorities in our life – otherwise, without rest, we may find ourselves spending time on things that aren't our priorities and we may consequently derive less meaning from our actions in the world.

Finally, we have some guideposts that we might use in our traditions to find some of that space. The Sabbath is one of these every week moments in the Jewish tradition that is focused around community, renewal, and a self-conscious break from technology and crucially, work. Now it may be hard to get a whole day in there for this sort of thing, and I sympathize. I don't get a whole day in, either, but carving out some recurring time to get in touch with yourself and the work you feel called to is important. We also have communion in the Christian tradition, which in mainline Protestant circles is mostly a once a month affair, but it is supposed to be a time of reflection on what we've been up to and what we want to be up to. It's supposed to spiritually nourishing food and drink for us to take up our tasks in the world with renewed vigor and purpose.

And so rest connects us with a sense of purpose for us to do the work of our lives, it allows us to reflect, and we have a couple of models for how that should happen in our lives. Hopefully at least some of these worship services are times of rest for you and your families as we gather together and talk and share the deepest ethical and spiritual commitments we have today. But also, it's important that we take rest seriously as a theological matter and as one that we ought to be doing. That means supporting other people's rest, celebrating when folks are honest about their limits on their time and energy. That's a communal virtue that I hope we'll practice together. And that means no nap-shaming. That's important. Don't shame naps, because we all need rest from time to time. I hope you'll take up that call to rest as we enter a busy church season here at Lake Street. Seriously, the next couple of months are absolutely packed. Take a break if you need it so you can fully plug in. And this Sunday, take a nap if you need it. Blessed Be.