

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, June 2, 2024
"Celebrating Rest"

Young at Heart Message

Before we really dive into the message today, I want to take time to rest our bodies and spirits, and to rest in God's loving embrace.

To do that, I want to try a short "embodiment practice" – a form of sacred movement that helps to unite mind, heart, and body to create a more balanced self.

This particular practice is very simple, and you can do it sitting down. Those of you attending Synod with me next weekend will get to do it again there.

We will begin by placing our hands over our hearts, or somewhere that is comfortable for each of us.

Then, we will do a silent breathing exercise together.

We will take a few deep breaths together.

When you breath in, say to yourself "God, Spirit, Jesus, Divine, Holy One... fill me with _____."

Choose a positive energy word, or a virtue that you feel you could use more of. For example, courage, love, hope, joy, strength...

On your "out" breath, say to yourself "May I be open to letting go of _____."

Choose something you feel like you might be holding on to that you would like to release. For example, anger, frustration, fear, uncertainty...

Let's repeat this mantra to ourselves 3 times as we fall into a few moments of silence together. The phrases are on the screens as a reminder. Let's begin.

In breath: "God, Spirit, Jesus, Divine, Holy One... fill me with _____."

Out breath: "May I be open to letting go of _____."

This is a practice I have encouraged people to use any time they need to because it is so simple and helps us to connect the mind, the body, and the spirit.

It is also a helpful reminder to be aware of our emotions and recognize when there might be some negative energy we could release, and when there might be some positive energy we would like to receive.

I invite you to remember the exercise and use it as often as you would like.

The Message

Today, we are talking about celebrating rest.

I had my monthly meeting with my Spiritual Director last week, and during that meeting, we were talking about self care and the ways I have been trying to create a better balance between my work life and my personal life.

My Spiritual Director and I have been working together for a couple years, so she knew me before I moved to Canada.

She is well aware of the lack of balance I had before I moved.

As we talked, I made a comment that went something like this:

I need to stay on top of making sure I have a good balance in my life so that I can avoid burning out as a pastor. If I burn out, I can no longer serve my congregation and I cannot bring my best self to my work. Too many pastors experience this, and I don't want to be one of them.

To this, my Spiritual Director said, "I wonder what would happen if you reframed it a bit so that, instead of creating a healthy balance to avoid burnout, you are creating a healthy balance in order to thrive both in your work and your personal life?"

She just about blew my mind with that comment.

Every other pastor I know – in fact, nearly every other working person I know, especially those in "helping" fields, try to prioritize avoiding burnout.

It never occurred to me that merely avoiding burnout doesn't necessarily mean I am caring for myself in ways that allow me to bring my best self to my work, and my best self to my personal life.

It doesn't necessarily mean I am caring for myself in ways that allow me to consistently thrive.

It simply means I am avoiding that ledge that so many people fall off of into an abyss of misery as they head toward burning out in the work they do.

This conversation, and today's scripture about Sabbath, seemed to collide for me as I prepared for today's service.

The conversation with my Spiritual Director reminded me just how important rest is, and how much our bodies and brains need opportunities to recharge and refresh.

And today's scripture is a reminder for all of us that holding to our convictions around rest and sabbath so tightly that we overlook the needs of others completely isn't necessarily the right thing, either.

In today's scripture, the Pharisees were giving Jesus a hard time because his disciples were picking grain on the Sabbath, and then Jesus healed a person on the Sabbath.

According to custom and what the Pharisees knew, working on the Sabbath was against the accepted rules and norms.

Jesus had to remind them that when there is someone in need in front of us, we are called to help them, even if it is supposed to be a rest day.

But, I also don't think Jesus intends to imply that people should always work through their rest days, either.

Again, this is another example of balance.

If someone comes to him on the Sabbath and needs healing, he's certainly not going to deny that person because it is the Sabbath.

But, Jesus does take time for himself, to be in prayer and to connect with God, and to rest.

So it begs the question for us then: how are we caring for ourselves and making sure we are getting the rest we need?

Rest might not always be physical rest.

For example, I know I am not the only one in this room right now who likes to stay busy.

Sometimes, resting the mind can mean doing something physical – gardening, hiking, or walking, for example.

Sometimes, rest can be a short and simple act of mindfulness amidst a busy day. The breathing exercise we did earlier is a great opportunity for a moment of rest during a time of busy-ness.

Rest allows us time to renew and refresh ourselves in whatever ways we might need in the moment.

There are perhaps times in our lives when something like attending church on Sunday doesn't feel like rest or Sabbath.

Sometimes it feels like work!

So many people put a lot of work into making Sunday worship and fellowship time a success every week.

And yet, many of us consider Sunday a Sabbath day.

How do we reconcile this "work" we do to participate in Sunday worship with this notion of "rest" or "Sabbath?"

Perhaps looking at it the way Jesus does – as taking joy in serving others, even though it does involve a bit of work on our part is a good way to look at it.

What if we recognize it as a moment of spiritual rest, rather than work we are required to do earlier than we'd like on a Sunday morning?

Once again, when the opportunity to be with one another in worship and fellowship is reframed not as work, but as spiritual rest and renewal for our souls, it no longer feels like work.

I find this to be a helpful way of looking at Sunday mornings because, obviously, as a pastor I am working on Sundays.

And yet, Sunday mornings rarely feel like work for me, believe it or not.

Most of the hard work gets done earlier in the week, so all I have to do is bring my best self, and trust that God has helped me prepare the best I could.

I sincerely hope that those of you who also have work to do for Sunday mornings – setting up fellowship time, getting hymnals out for people, preparing and running the AV system, preparing and playing music for the day, counting offerings, cleaning up after fellowship time, and any other work that goes into Sunday mornings – are able to find spiritual rest in that "busy-ness" of the work that goes into Sunday morning services.

I hope that, like Jesus, there is a joy in doing the work to serve others.

As you leave here today, I encourage you to hold onto this notion of celebrating rest, and of maintaining a healthy balance of work and rest as a way to thrive and bring your best self both to your work and your personal life.

If we all are able to bring our best, well-rested selves to everything we do, suddenly we are able to help one another thrive in a world where many people feel they are merely surviving.

May we celebrate rest for our bodies, minds, and spirits in ways that help us thrive, both on our own and in community with one another.

Resting well allows us to serve well, to grow well, to learn well, to love well, and to be well.

May we be well in our souls. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of rest, thank you for helping us recognize when our bodies, minds, or spirits need renewal. We pray that you would guide us toward taking the time to rest in ways that will refresh us when we need to do that for ourselves. When we are overwhelmed by life, or anxious about something, or when we are simply overdoing it, help us remember to take the time we need for Sabbath. Help us to rest so that we can thrive, rather than merely survive. We pray all of this in your Holy name. Amen.