Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, July 5, 2026
"To Be Given Rest"

Young at Heart Message

Yesterday, I did my first ever open water swim in preparation for the triathlon that I'm registered to do at the end of the month.

If you have ever tried swimming in open water (as opposed to a swimming pool) you know that it is a very different experience.

First of all, if you have to wear a wetsuit, that experience is something in itself, let me tell you.

But simply swimming in a body of water is also a very different experience.

In a swimming pool, there are lines painted on the bottom of the pool which make staying in your lane easy. But even if that doesn't work for some reason, there are floating strings that keep you from moving too far one way or the other.

In open water, you don't have any lines to follow. In fact, at least in the lake I was swimming in, the water was so murky that I couldn't even see my own arms.

So your only means of staying on a straight path is to either try to follow the shore, or lift your head every so often to orient yourself.

The water is also generally colder in open water (although not always).

So, yesterday, I started my swim experience by putting on my wetsuit.

If you've never put a wetsuit on, that is a workout all by itself. By the time I was ready to actually swim, I felt like I'd already done a full workout!

But, I got the wetsuit on and I got into the water. And man, was that water COLD! I was swimming in Ghost Lake (reservoir), which is glacier fed, so the water is a bit of a shock.

The good news is that the wetsuit did its job and kept my body warm.

My hands and face took a little time to adjust to the water temperature, but after a couple minutes, that was no longer a problem.

It takes a little time to get used to swimming with new and different (and a bit restrictive) gear.

It also takes time when you're nervous and uncertain to allow your heart rate and breathing to calm down.

So, I had a very slow start with lots of trips back to the shore to rest, catch my breath, and check in with my lifeguard (Erick was the lucky guy).

After several times of swimming back to shore to rest, I started rolling over onto my back to float and/or do a few strokes to keep moving.

It slows you down to do this, but it allowed me to catch my breath and reset my tired shoulders without going back to shore repeatedly.

And actually, I discovered something else in that process, too.

Rolling onto my back was *lovely*. It wasn't just a physical rest.

I was looking up at a beautiful blue sky with fluffy white clouds in it. I couldn't see anything but sky.

No buildings. No smoke or smog. No cranes. No airplanes. No people. No boats.

Nothing but blue sky and white clouds and a feeling of being supported by the lake.

In actuality, I was being supported mostly by a wetsuit that made me more buoyant, but it *felt* like the lake was supporting me.

And, I was able to rest.

It wasn't just rest from the weariness of this new skill I was trying to learn and develop.

It wasn't just rest for my tired shoulders and my calves that wanted to cramp.

It wasn't just rest from feeling a little disappointed that I was swimming SO slow compared to normal.

It was rest from everything.

From the busy-ness of my life. From the stress of training. From whatever else was on my mind.

It was pure, unencumbered rest.

I think I would go so far as to say that blue sky and those white clouds and the peaceful feeling of floating alone with nothing clouding my vision or my heart was rest in God.

Momentary, blissful, deep, abiding rest in God.

It reminded me of a dream, or my childhood, maybe – the wonder and excitement of floating and just being. Just being me, bringing all of myself to God in that moment.

And then, I turned over and kept swimming.

The Message

Our Gospel reading today from Matthew 11 says, “If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest.”

Often we are encouraged to rest from the busy-ness of life. And, don’t get me wrong – we *should* rest from that busy-ness.

But I wonder what that rest looks like?

For working people, how often do we truly rest on our days off?

Sure, we might not be working. But are we truly resting?

Or are we cleaning, running errands, making phone calls, checking in on all the balls we have in the air, or just generally catching up on life?

And, for those who aren’t working anymore, do you truly get rest, or are you busier than ever?

Even if we do manage to get real rest that is unencumbered by anxiety over all the things we should be doing instead, what does that rest look like?

Is it restorative, renewing, and re-energizing? Or, is it zoning out to try to forget the busy life we usually lead?

Is it weighed down with guilt about everything you’re not doing while you’re resting?

Maybe it’s just me who struggles with truly resting (those who know me likely aren’t surprised by this!), but I don’t think I am the only one.

Whenever I go to King's Fold Retreat Centre to try to get true rest, one of the things they tell people is to try not to bring too much "to do."

In other words, if you go thinking "I'm going to get so much reading done! I'm going to take five books with me," you may feel disappointed that you don't get much reading done.

They have learned over many years of welcoming retreatants that many, many people on retreat need true and abiding rest.

Sometimes that means sleep – lots of sleep. Sometimes that means sitting and listening to the wind or the river or the birds.

Sometimes that means turning off the phone.

But often, it does not mean frantically trying to accomplish all of the things you thought you would try to accomplish with the spare time.

Instead, King's Fold has found that for many people, being on retreat means truly resting. Slowing down. Flipping over to swim on your back and look at the blue sky and the fluffy white clouds.

And to rest in God. Settle in. Release your burdens. Allow yourself to go to God – to go to Jesus – so that you can receive rest.

Allow that gift to wash over you.

You may not always be able to set aside your burdens permanently. But for a moment, stop swimming, roll over, and float there.

Allow God to support you fully. Relax your body, feel God holding you firmly, and release yourself.

Feel the weightlessness of floating – being fully supported and setting down the weight of the burdens you carry.

Allow God to take that weight off your shoulders, even for a moment.

Rest.

Rest in God's abiding love for you.

Let's take a moment now to try a spiritual practice together.

Let's use our imaginations momentarily.

Close your eyes, if that is available to you. And if not, then just soften your gaze and allow your eyes to relax.

Take two deep breaths – in… and out.

In… and out.

Now, imagine you are at a body of water. Choose a place that you've been before that is a comfort to you, perhaps.

It can be the clearest, cleanest water you've ever been in – this is a safe place to be.

Imagine this water is clear and still. There is no danger.

Now imagine it's a beautiful, clear, sunny day. Or, imagine your favourite weather. Something that feels safe and comfortable to you.

You don't even have to get wet in this water if you don't want to. Just be in it.

Once you have imagined this safe body of water, imagine you are wading in.

As you wade into that clear, glassy water that is the perfect temperature, you feel yourself getting lighter.

As the water begins to cover your body and reaches your shoulders, imagine whatever you are carrying begins to become weightless. If you want, it can even float away, or float nearby if you need to pick it up again later.

Now, I want you to allow yourself to float. Feel the weight of your own body lift.

Look up at the sky – maybe it's blue with fluffy clouds, or maybe it's a pink and purple sunset.

This is your safe place to rest, so it can be whatever makes you feel comfortable and happy.

Feel yourself being supported fully by that water.

Now imagine that the water is God. Maybe God's arms are what's supporting you in the water. Maybe you are in a nest or cocoon with God.

But imagine God is there.

If there is something you'd like to say to God, or if there is a burden or weight you've been carrying that you want to ask God to take or at least help you carry, lift that to God now.

Take 30 seconds of silence to float, feeling yourself fully supported, and offer to God whatever needs to be offered.

And if there is nothing or you're not sure what you need or want to say, that's OK. Just feel yourself being supported and loved.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes. If the burden you set aside needs to be picked back up, pick it up. But, notice if it feels a little lighter now.

Come back to the present and notice how you are feeling now. Maybe you feel lighter, more peaceful, or more settled.

Maybe you don't feel any different, and that's OK, too.

Just allow yourself to be however and whoever you are in this moment.

Welcome yourself without judgement.

As we come back to the present and begin to settle back into life, I invite you to rest.

"If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest" says Jesus.

As you leave here today – as you go out into the rest of your day, the rest of your week, may you remember this exercise any time you need to use it.

It is available to you whenever you need it.

May you allow God to help you carry your burdens. May you welcome the rest that God offers and may you welcome God's love for you, always. Amen.

Let us pray:

God, we come to you, weary.
We lay down our heavy burdens.
You who are gentle and humble in heart,
give us rest for our souls.
Yoke our hearts to Jesus,
that we may learn the ways of love,
that we may live with courage and peace. Amen.