

PROPER ELEVEN, PENTECOST NINE, YEAR B, JULY 21, 2024

Since the beginning of time there have been inventions that were created to make our lives easier. From the wheel to the compass, to the printing press, the steam engine, electricity, the automobile, the telephone, radio and television, the airplane, computers, to cell phones all of these inventions have created new ways of making our lives easier. Within our homes, the refrigerator, washing machine, dryer, dish washer, microwave are all conveniences designed to help us to do more in less time. Yet why is it that we seem to be busier than ever and have less free time than ever before?

During the pandemic many of us had the opportunity to slow down and concentrate on other areas of our lives but now we appear to be back to our normal busyness. The world is speeding up again. And with that in mind, this seems like a good time to focus on the invitation that Jesus offers in today's gospel reading, to his disciples, to "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

The disciples had just returned from their first mission trip and they were excited. They told Jesus all that they had done and taught and they were ready to do more, to build on their success. But Jesus responded to their enthusiasm with this invitation to "come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Jesus knew that this rest was the most important thing that his disciples needed at that point. They had done important work, but now it was time to rest.

But I don't think that this rest is simply physical rest. I think Jesus is offering them spiritual rest, rest for their souls. What Jesus is doing is inviting his disciples to do what he did regularly. We know that even when Jesus' ministry was going well he got up in the morning and went to a deserted place to pray and get some needed spiritual rest. Some rest for his soul.

When we think of rest, we usually think of rest for our bodies. But when Jesus thinks of rest, he is also talking about rest for our souls. And these are very different. Of course, in this fast-paced world of ours, we often forget to do either of these, don't we?

Studies show that we Americans currently average 6.5 hours of sleep a day, which is down more than an hour from what it was just 10 years ago. There are many studies these days that show that getting 7-9 hours of sleep a night is important for most of us. But many of us are not getting that kind of physical rest. And our physical health is affected by that.

But what about our spiritual rest? Are we getting enough of that? And what happens when we don't get enough rest for our souls? When we don't spend enough time in prayer? When we don't spend enough time in worship? When we don't spend enough time with God's Word? I think it is similar to what happens when we don't get enough sleep. Our souls become vulnerable to dis-ease.

We might become, for example, more and more frustrated and burned out, even if we are doing good things. We might forget why we are doing those good things. We might forget to rely on God when we are doing those things. Or forget that it is really not about us; it's about God. I think that this is why Jesus encouraged his disciples to get away and rest a while, after they had returned from their mission trip. He needed them to rest and refresh their bodies and souls.

Too often we are afraid to take time to relax because we don't want anybody to think we're lazy or a goof off. If people are resting, we may be suspicious of them. If we

are resting, we may be suspicious of ourselves. We have this strange belief that we somehow need to justify our existence by what we produce. We even seem to enjoy the hectic pace of our lives because who is eager to tell someone you meet about their down time, but we do often hear stories of busyness. Our culture supports the idea that activity and accomplishment are better than rest. We identify ourselves to one another most often by what we do rather than who we are.

Our work needs to be balanced by rest. And especially by resting in God? Isn't that what it means to "remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy"? Aren't we simply doing what God modeled for us in Genesis, when God rested? And aren't we simply doing what Jesus modeled for us when he got up while it was still dark and went to a deserted place to pray? It's not just about one day a week to do things that revitalize you. We need to take brief moments of quiet every day to perhaps sit quietly, or listen to music, or read something.

It's funny, we Americans, who consider ourselves the freest people on earth, shackle ourselves to our busyness, and in the process we give up the most basic of human rights: time to be who we are. Even when we are retired, we don't take enough time to rest.

There's a story about the legendary Greek storyteller Aesop was seen playing childish games with some little boys. A man approached Aesop and asked him why he wasted his time in such frivolous activity. Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string, and placing it on the ground. Then he said to the man, "Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bows implies."

The man looked at it for several moments but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make. Aesop explained, "If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be more fit for use when you want it."

We are very much like the bow. If we do not take time to rest we will snap. Taking time to be alone with God also not only gives us rest but it strengthens our inner being. Making time in our busy 21st century lives for rest is essential. It is a necessary element of our physical, emotional and spiritual lives to which we must attend, and usually gets neglected.

The French mathematician and theologian Pascal once said that more than half this world's ills come from how people cannot sit in a room alone and just be. Our refusal to rest can hurt us, the people around us, and the endeavors to which we devote ourselves. However, when we are alone and take time to be with God we are reminded that we are loved for who we are not what we have done. When we are alone God reminds us that God loves us.

Jesus invites all who are weary and heavily burdened to let him share our load and give us the kind of deep inner rest that we could never find on our own. Together with Christ we find rest for our souls and freedom from the heavy burdens which wear us down.

So the message this morning is about making time in our busy 21st century lives for rest. It is not only essential it is a necessary element for our physical, emotional and spiritual lives to which we must attend. So remember

Take time to LAUGH, it is the music of the soul.

Take time to THINK, it is the source of power.

Take time to PLAY, it is the source of perpetual youth.

Take time to READ, it is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to PRAY, it is the greatest power on earth.
Take time to LOVE AND BE LOVED, it is a God-given privilege.
Take time to be FRIENDLY, it is the road to happiness.
Take time to GIVE, it is too short a day to be selfish.
Take time to WORK, it is the value of accomplishment.
Take time for GOD, it is the way of life. Amen.