

Rest is Resistance

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Mark 6:30-34

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John Kenneth Galbraith was one of the leading economists of the mid-twentieth century and served as a political adviser to a number of presidents. In his autobiography, Galbraith tells a story about how he had once come home from a difficult day at work, and he asked the housekeeper, a woman named Emily Gloria Wilson, to hold any of his telephone calls so that he could take a nap.

Shortly after he went to sleep, the phone rang. The voice on the other line said, "I need to speak to Ken Galbraith, please." And she said, "I'm sorry, but he's not available right now."

"I *really* need to speak to Galbraith – it's very important. Put him on the phone, please." But Mrs. Wilson reiterated her message.

Finally, the person on the other line said, "Mam, this is President Lyndon B. Johnson, and I need to speak to Mr. Galbraith immediately."

"I'm sorry, Mr. President, but he's sleeping, and he said not to disturb him." "Well, wake him up!," Johnson responded.

"I can't do that, Mr. President. I work for him and not for you. He'll have to call you back when he wakes up. Goodbye." said Mrs. Wilson. And she hung up the phone.

When Galbraith woke up, he asked if he had received any calls, and Mrs. Wilson said, "Well – there was this one that you might want to return." Galbraith immediately called the President, and Lyndon Johnson picked up the phone and said, "Who in the world was the woman – and how can I get her to come work at the White House with me?"¹

It's a great story, because the vast majority of us would never have the audacity to do what Mrs. Wilson did that day, would we? Our world simply doesn't function that way. We do not exist a culture that honors, protects, and prioritizes rest.

For instance,

- How many of us, when people ask how we're doing, respond by sharing how "busy" we have been – and then we proceed to list off all the things we've been so busy doing?

¹ Based on a story in Galbraith's autobiography, *A Life in Our Times*.

- Or, how many of us have ever felt guilty for taking time off work - for putting away our emails and to-do lists, especially when we know that there is more work that needs to be done?
- Or how many of us find ourselves saying, “After this week is over, or after this project is finished, or after graduation, or after the kids move out - I really think things are finally going to start to slow down” – but deep down, we know that we’ve been saying that week after week after week – and life only gets busier.

And yet, how many of us also found ourselves experiencing a slower pace of life during Covid, and even though the world is opening back up again, we don’t necessarily want to return to the hustle and bustle of our pre-Covid lives?

That’s why I believe that today’s Gospel reading is quite timely for us – especially as we begin thinking toward the fall and all that we are going to start including back in our schedules again. Because this story reminds us that Jesus sees and values the importance of a rhythm of rest with the work that he calls his followers to do. Because even when he and the disciples are surrounded by the very real needs of so many people surrounding them, he says to them, “Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.”

Just verses earlier, Jesus sent the disciples out into the villages and they do lots of incredible things: they preach the gospel, they heal people who are sick, they drive out demons. I can imagine them returning to Jesus, so excited about everything that has happened that they just can’t wait to tell him all about it.

But Jesus’ reaction to them is so very telling. He listens to them intently, but notice that he doesn’t say- “What are you all doing here talking to me when there are so many more people in need? There’s a whole world that needs saving – get back out there!” OR “Guys – this is only your first mission. Why are you back already? Grab some coffee and get back to work! He doesn’t say anything like that at all. Instead, he instructs the disciples to rest.

And I think the juxtaposition of these two instructions, for the disciples to be sent out to do the work of Jesus earlier in chapter 6, and for them to come back to rest and to be with Jesus later in chapter 6 is significant, because it lets us know that there is something about one that must directly impact the other.

There is something about resting and being with Jesus that directly impacts the way in which we are sent out to do the work of Jesus. There is something about rest that allows us to be formed and transformed to do the things God is calling us to do – and to be the people God is calling us to be.

After all, did you see what happens right after their time of rest? Just verses after their time of rest, Jesus and the disciples feed the five thousand along the hillside with just five loaves and two fish. Something transformative happens in verses 30-32 that leads to one of the most

amazing stories in the Gospels. It makes me wonder what might happen if you and I were to take naps more often!

But in all seriousness, the question we might ask ourselves this morning is: how often do you and I intentionally take time to do what Jesus instructs the disciples do here? How often do we truly rest and allow ourselves to be renewed for whatever it is God is calling us toward? Or do we just keep going at such a fast pace until we're exhausted, and then we crash, and repeat the cycle all over again.

In a recent TED Talk, writer Anne Lamott said, "I am convinced that almost everything will work again if you just unplug it for a few minutes – including you."² If Jesus were to say to you today, come away to a quiet place, unplug, and get some rest – what would that actually look like for you – and how can you make a practice of really doing it?

You might say, "Mary Alice, that sounds nice and all, but really I don't have time to rest." Our children are back in the building today – which brings us so much joy. But I can only imagine what the parents in the room must be thinking. You've been with your kids non-stop for the past 17 months – to get some rest sounds great – but how? And when?"

Or, maybe you feel guilty for pausing to rest when there is so much in our world that needs to be done. I mean, how can we rest in light of the injustices and inequities in our world? How can we truly rest when the forces at work against us seem so relentless?

I can relate. Which is why I was especially intrigued to see an encouragement to rest somewhere lately that felt completely out of place – at the Breonna Taylor exhibit here in Louisville at the Speed Art Museum. I went with Robin Ramsay Lee to the exhibit, which was entitled Promise, Witness, Remembrance and reflected on Breonna Taylor's life, her killing in 2020, and the year of protests that followed, both here in Louisville and around the world.³

There were incredible displays, stunning photographs, and moving works of art throughout the exhibit, including a beautiful portrait of Breonna by the same artist who painted the official portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama in 2016.

But one thing that especially caught my eye in the exhibit was a small sign in the corner of the room. It said, "As you move through the Promise, Witness, Remembrance exhibit, you might feel the need for a moment of care or a moment of rest." And, if that were the case, you could text the word REST to the number provided to receive a guided meditation from The Nap Ministry.

² https://www.ted.com/talks/anne_lamott_12_truths_i_learned_from_life_and_writing

³ More info about the exhibit available here: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/louisville-exhibition-honors-breonna-taylor-180977503/>

Now first of all, I don't know about you, but I had never heard of the "nap ministry" before. As a minister, I was ordained to the gospel ministry, but for a moment I wondered if I had chosen the wrong profession, because being the Minister of Naps seemed like a pretty sweet gig.

But I also wondered – especially given the focus of the exhibit, you might think there would be not an invitation to rest – but an encouragement to get to work! I mean, shouldn't there be names of local justice groups with whom to partner and work in our community? Or places to donate money? Ways to join the resistance? Until I kept reading the sign that day and realized the irony of it all; that to rest in the face of injustice *is*, in fact, an act of resistance.

I learned that the Nap Ministry⁴, as it's called, was begun in Atlanta, Georgia by a young Black woman named Tricia Hersey as a prophetic act of resistance against the despair she was experiencing. In 2013, Tricia had just begun seminary at Emory University, and the pace was rigorous. She would wake up at 3 AM to study, leave her apartment by 6 AM for her 8 AM classes, and sometimes she wouldn't get home until after midnight. Tricia was also a single mom at the time to her 6-year-old son. And all the more challenging was the fact that Tricia felt "unseen and unheard among her mostly white peers" at Emory.

The news of increasing police brutality against Black people only intensified her weariness. She became active in the Black Lives Matter movement and a key leader on the front lines in Atlanta protesting for justice. One day, she was robbed while walking home with her son, losing her class notes, her research, and her very first sermon, which she was scheduled to preach in just two days.

At that point, she was about ready to quit school and give up. Instead, she started napping. She napped in the campus quad, in the library, in the upholstered balcony pews of her seminary Chapel. "I was healing," she said. "Naps really saved my life in that way." Hersey talks about naps the way some people might describe a spiritual experience—because for her, that's what they are. "Sleep is such a vulnerable place," she says. "You have space to talk and vent, to hope, to dream. You can work things out you can't work out when you're awake."

The idea inspired her to begin to research rest as both a healing mechanism for trauma and a form of resistance against oppression. She writes, "I began experimenting with these ideals as a way to connect with my Ancestors...to honor my body via rest for the rest they never were able to embody. This was about far more than naps," she says. Soon, she began to guide local justice groups through various meditations and nap talks, like the one she provided for the Speed Museum this year.

Today, she says, "[We must] resist these toxic systems that want us to be disconnected, that want us to work 80 hours a week, that want us to feel like we're not worthy unless we're constantly producing something." She says, "I want to uplift that when you're sleeping, you are actually doing something. You're honoring your God-given body. You are giving your brain a

⁴ <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com>

moment to download new information. You're disrupting toxic systems at work around you by reclaiming rest."⁵

And I can't help but wonder if Jesus, somehow, knew the same. Jesus knew the powers and principalities that he was up against. Jesus knew the constant needs of the world around him. And yet, perhaps an act of resistance that may have even seemed foolish to everyone else – Jesus stopped to rest. And he instructed his followers to do the same.

And so, may we, too, find rest – in whatever ways we can and at whatever times we can - as an act of resistance against whatever it is we are facing these days - as a reminder that we do not face it alone.

Because the God who causes the heart to rest after every single beat. The God who calls the sun to set every day without one single exception. The God who makes the ocean tide to go out and lungs to exhale and animals to hibernate and leaves to change and fall to the ground change – friends this is the same God who invites each of us to lean into the sacredness of rest.

To be still and know that God is God.

To be still and know that God is.

To be still and know.

To be still.

To be.

May it be so of us, friends. Amen.

⁵ Resources consulted include: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/louisville-exhibition-honors-breonna-taylor-180977503/>, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/health/the-atlanta-nap-ministry-preaches-the-liberating-power-of-rest/>, <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/04/869952476/atlanta-based-organization-advocates-for-rest-as-a-form-of-social-justice>, <https://www.promisewitnessremembrance.org/experience/>