

**REST**  
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16th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

**Mark 6:30-34**

*The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.*

There's more to lesson—and we'll come back to it—but this is a pretty good place for us to begin this morning. **Rest.**

I don't know about you, but I have found the past few weeks to be exhilarating, emotional and all too often, exhausting (and I've been on vacation!) Seriously—its been a dizzying roller coaster of sorrow and anger, and joy. We have been witness to unspeakable acts of violence and hatred unfolding right alongside these amazing eruptions of justice, compassion and goodness. And we so programmed to respond: what do we DO now?

Our friend Pastor Steve, in a typically marvelous reflection entitled "What To Do About Charleston" begins his list with this plea: first, please, "do nothing. Just sit there. Seriously. Do nothing. Stop. Stop trying to put it out of your mind. Stop trying to go on to other things. Stop and sit with it. Stay there... don't do anything... just let it be." Of course, he's not saying that the remaining things on his list—prayer, deep listening, education, conversation, reaching out—he's not saying that these are not important. Just that they are not enough. We must practice pausing. Everything good begins there. Making space. Allowing our hearts to be broken over and over again until they break open enough to contain it all. All the sorrow and all the joy. When I watched the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington standing on the steps of the Supreme Court singing the national anthem, my heart broke into a million pieces.

But we are so biased toward action. We buy into the cultural message that we are first and foremost producers and consumers. We define ourselves, and our worth, by what we **do** and what we **have**, rather than how fully and deeply we live, praise, bless, celebrate and love the world—you know, those things that actually make us human. And of course, being human hurts. It involves loss and joy and change, and maybe if we just keep moving, we can stay ahead of it all.

In our story today, the apostles are fresh from a round of healing and teaching, and pretty full of themselves and all the good things they have accomplished. They gather around Jesus and regale him with their successes, working to gain his approval. "Look at me Jesus! Look at all the good that I have done. I am just so busy. "

Mind you, the gospel writer has placed this happy little scene right after recounting the gruesome details of John the Baptist's beheading. An unspeakable act of violence that was also somehow linked to this eruption of justice, compassion and goodness. The senseless murder of his cousin and mentor was a kind of turning point for Jesus, propelling him on

the Way. Where people follow. And are empowered. And great healing happens. Joy and sorrow, intertwined.

And just then, *the apostles gather around Jesus, and tell him all that they had done and taught. And he responds: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."*

The little Greek word "rest" is one that implies restoration and re-creation, not exhausted collapse. This is an invitation to stop, to take time, to focus attention away from all the doing, all the news, and all the things good and bad that captivate our attention, in order to become more fully present to what is. This is an invitation to Sabbath time. Its about cultivating our awareness of the Holy around us and within us in order to become more fully who we were created to be. It is about presence born of deep listening, wonder and celebration--eating and drinking, singing and delighting,

Sabbath, restorative rest, is deep spiritual wisdom. It is a practice present in all the deep wisdom traditions, and for our great ancestors, it was a central and defining one. According to Rabbi Arthur Green, in his lovely book *Judaism's Ten Best Ideas*, Sabbath just may be Judaism's single best gift to this hyperactive world.

It all begins with the Hebrew creation story, where rest is woven into the very fabric of creation. For six days the Spirit-wind Breath of Creative Life, Yahweh, moves across the formless, chaotic but pregnant deep, birthing from it light, life and goodness. And on the seventh day, Yahweh rests and blesses. This is not an exhausted God falling into his hammock for the afternoon. This is Yahweh, creative breath of life, who on the seventh day, according to the ancient rabbis, exhales, creating tranquility, serenity, peace and rest. Only then is creation complete. Only with rest, and blessing, can our work and our lives bear fruit that is fully formed.

Sabbath practice is featured in our tradition's "Ten Invitations to Abundant Life" (known to us misleadingly as "commandments"). For our great ancestors, the practice of "remembering the Sabbath" was right up there with not killing, not stealing, and not lying as foundations for wholehearted living and community. For a people that had so recently been enslaved, this notion of setting aside one whole day for *not working* must have seemed as radical as it was welcome.

A whole day of *not working* sounds pretty radical today. But: is it welcome? We have elevated busyness to an art form, and a way of life. And, we have allowed ourselves to become the most systematically overworked nation on the planet. We are the only developed country with no mandated parental leave, sick leave, or even annual leave, and one of the very few nations in the entire world with no laws limiting the workweek. Most Americans do work more than 40 hours a week. Our average annual vacation time is a fraction of what it is in other developed countries, and more and more of us are tethered to the workplace 24/7 through our electronic devices as the boundaries between personal and professional time become increasingly blurred.

In this world, Sabbath is an act of open resistance, according to Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman. It is an intentional "withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being."

And of course our bias toward action, this pressure to prove ourselves by overdoing and over committing, has seeped way past the professional sphere into our community,

personal and yes church lives. When did the standard response to “how are you?” become “I am just so busy”?

Pastor and therapist Wayne Mueller encourages us to explore Sabbath as not just a discrete practice but also a whole way of living that honors restorative rest. Sabbath time, he says, is “a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities and accomplishments... its a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity... ‘remember the Sabbath’ means “remember that everything you have received is a blessing. Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your labor. Remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it all...”

This may mean not working today, and it may suggest turning off our electronics for an hour or a day or week, it may be a daily practice of deep listening, a walk in nature, the intentional blessing of strangers, a gratefulness journal “anything,” Mueller writes “that preserves a visceral experience of life.”

Sabbath is so much more than the absence of work... it is also, he insists, “the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us.”

So its not a turning away from life, it is a turning toward re-creation, a deepening of our capacity for full human being, for compassionate and creative, healing presence.

Because, of course, our story doesn't end with rest (does it ever?) Jesus and his friends spend some time on that boat—we don't know how long—but I'm going to go with just long enough. Sometimes, one deep, mindful breath is all it takes. Meanwhile, the crowds run ahead of them and meet them on the other side. And Jesus, we are told, responds with compassion—it's a verb we don't have (but need!): he compassionates. And he teaches them, and when they get hungry he shows the disciples—and us-- that there is always more than enough to share—time and bread, attention and love-- if we just pause long enough to notice.

We are a Sabbath people, a community of resistance. We gather here, each and every Sunday to remember who and whose we are—not producers and consumers, but big bold lovers of a vast and magnificent universe, of which each of us is a unique and beloved part. We practice pausing; we praise; we name and claim the ways we fall short. We receive love, seek wisdom, and give thanks. And we encourage each another to remember to bless, celebrate and love, no matter what. And we listen together for the voice of Love that is calling us to life abundant, right here and right now. May it be so.

### Hymn “I Will Come to You”

Wayne Mueller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives*, 2000.  
Walter Brueggeman, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to a Culture of Now*, 2014.  
Arthur Green: *Judaism's Ten Best Ideas: A Brief Guide for Seekers*, 2014.