



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

**THE SECOND
SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST**

JUNE 2, 2024

A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham

Are we struck by the irony? In this morning's reading from the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus is calling out the Pharisees for being legalists. The Pharisees embraced the letter of the Law...and the Pharisees rejected the spirit of the Law. The Pharisees engaged their brains...and the Pharisees betrayed their hearts. The Pharisees had it right...and the Pharisees had it wrong. Where the Pharisees failed was in making an idol of the exhaustive and intricate teachings about work on the Sabbath. They could quibble endlessly about what was permitted and what was not. And they could not resist taunting Jesus about plucking heads of grain or healing a withered hand on the Sabbath.

Yet the Pharisees were seeking only to uphold a prominent provision of the Law that we all know well. Indeed, we are gathered together here this morning because we read the same dictates of the Law that the Pharisees read in chapter five of Deuteronomy:

[T]he seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God ... you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.¹

After all, we are made in the image of God, and even God rested on the seventh day in the creation stories.

The God who created us knows us. And God knows we need rest. It is part of being the humans God created us to be. As Jesus told the Pharisees, the Sabbath was made for humans, not the other way around.

We would be challenged, too, to find a religion or religious leader, who would say otherwise. And that says nothing about physicians, athletes, corporate leaders, or about poets and philosophers. Even Supreme Court Louis Brandeis, who sat on the Court from 1916 to 1939, once said "I need

¹ Deuteronomy 5:12-14 (NRSV).

rest. I find that I can do a year's work in eleven months, but I can't do it in twelve."²

But I wonder what Jesus would say to our result-oriented, productivity demanding culture. Rest is seen as countercultural and a sign of weakness. We are driven instead to determine our worth through acquisition of wealth, property, power, or skills, and through notoriety and fame. We are saddled with anxiety and insecurity, and robbed of contentment with what we have. Rest is an afterthought, easily ignored. And much to our peril. No doubt Jesus would be as perturbed about our nonchalance about the Sabbath as he was about the Pharisees' overly legalistic interpretation of God's insistence that we rest one day a week. Even retirees.

When we are retired, after all, we get no days off. And as we nominally retired souls confront the impact of ageing bodies and minds, and schedules that have us slaloming around medical appointments and procedures, as well as the usual demands of living day-to-day, the need for rest is compounded.

Whether working or retired, in the absence of rest, we start a downward spiral that ends with the extinction of our humanity. First, we just become what I call dangerously tired. Our judgment is frayed, our reflexes become a bit sluggish, our tempers are held in less restraint. Without rest we become exhausted. The basic demands of life become less manageable. Routine chores fall by the wayside. But we still may call on our reserves when we have to. Without rest then we become depleted, as our reserves are drained. The routine becomes demanding, the demanding seems impossible, and our best selves become diminished, as our basic humanity is frayed around the edges.

And our humanity, our identities begin to deteriorate. When people question where have we gone, when friends ask where is the person they know we are, when they say, pull yourself together, it is precisely because we are disintegrating. We are burned out. And we become dysfunctional.

Consequently, our relationships with others falter as we tend to misread and misinterpret what others say and do. We readily project negative motives on other people. Anxiety and stress leave us more likely to be volatile

² "Our Namesake, Louis D. Brandeis," University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandies School of Law, <https://louisville.edu/law/about/namesake> (accessed June 1, 2024).

emotionally and more easily irritated.³ We lash out arbitrarily at friends and family.⁴

We will more likely suffer from insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system. Stress will increase our susceptibility to heart disease, diabetes, and depression.⁵ When we ignore the need for rest, we depreciate who we are as humans.

On the other hand, when we honor the Sabbath not only with worship, but also with rest, we gain the benefits and blessings lost when rest eludes us. Our bodies are healthier. We have more energy. We gain a healthy perspective on unfinished tasks. We learn to concede that

[I]f this task does not get done today, it does not mean I have failed. It just means that I will get to it tomorrow.⁶

Ever have a to-do list that got shorter?

When we step off the treadmill of our lives, we have the opportunity to invest in relationships, to take the time for the long talks and healthy conversations and sharing that build and strengthen relationships, or even just honor those lifelong, loving relationships that already are essential to our lives.

Time away from work and routine chores and distractions also allow us to time to reflect on our lives. We can step back, reassess our values and dreams, and even God's vision for our lives. And then can hold our lives up to those values and visions. We can refocus and rejuvenate accordingly. Rest allows our battered bodies to mend. Rest allows our overtaxed minds to recuperate. Rest allows our beleaguered spirits to renew. They each go hand-in-hand to truly restore, refresh, and reinvigorate us to sustain us as we address the God-given tasks of our lives at hand.

This hardly is to denigrate the importance or dignity of work. Remember God worked six days before resting, making the link to rest and its sanctity explicit. God established a pattern of work and rest. Working without rest or resting without work deviates from God's created order and vision. After all, God conferred on us the care and stewardship of creation. It is an

³ "Balancing Rhythms of Rest and Work, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/wellness/balancing-rhythms-of-rest-and-work/ar-BB1mWrzC> (accessed May 27, 2024).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Joshua Becker, The Lost Practice of Resting One Day Each Week, *becomingminimalist*, <https://www.becomingminimalist.com/resting/> (accessed May 27, 2024).

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immense task. One that requires hard work, but still one that demands sufficient rest.

We exhibit an immense trust in God when we rest. We honor who we are. We honor who God made us. We honor the roles God has reserved for us in realizing God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We trust that what is left undone today will still be done, not necessarily in our time, but in God's.

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