

5/24/20

## Seven Ways To Rest

This is the last Sunday in our sermon series, “Drawn In: Living Out The Creative Life With God. Each week we’ve used keywords that outline the creative process: dream, hover, risk, listen, re-integrate—today’s word is “rest.”

What does resting have to do with creativity? Too often these days we are focused so much on deadline after deadline, on maximum productivity, that we push through in a way that becomes unsustainable, that burns us out. Resting, in its various forms, is an important part of life’s rhythm. Genesis tells us that God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. “Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” Throughout the week of bringing Creation into being, God looked at his handiwork and “saw that it was good,” and the seventh day was just as important: a day to pause and reflect and to celebrate!

So let me list my seven favorite kinds of rest, behaviors that can replenish us and nourish us through the healing relaxation they provide.

The first kind of rest we might call “play.” “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” goes the old saying, recognizing the need for balance in one’s life. This “play” might be playing music just for the fun of it; playing catch with your son or daughter or playing with your dog. Maybe it’s a bike ride, or going for a walk.

Major corporations that need creative thinkers have come to realize the importance of play; they not only allow it, but encourage it. At Google, for example, employees have ready access to all sorts of activities like bowling, wall climbing, and volleyball. So think of “play” as any activity that refreshes the mind, that provokes wonder and joy, that relies on effortlessness and spontaneity, that allows us to be “drawn in” rather than “driven.”

A second kind of rest that can re-ignite the creative spirit is what the Japanese call “forest-bathing,” and you might know as “a walk in the woods.” For many of us, nothing cleanses the soul like absorbing the beauty of God’s Creation: a magical sunset or a full moon reflecting on the waters speaks to us in a way that words cannot begin to match, and slows us down in a manner that counters the hurly-burly world we live in. Nothing inspired Beethoven more than spending time in nature; he would come home from a walk in the Black Forest, and right away, begin composing!

My third favorite kind of rest is almost too obvious: sleep! It’s a fascinating field for scientific research, but it doesn’t take a Ph.D. to know that going without sleep for too long makes us feel terrible, and that getting a good night’s sleep can make us feel ready to take on the world. Certainly sleep plays a critical role in immune function, metabolism, memory, and learning. But not only does sleep get us ready for the next day, but resting the conscious mind can allow wonderful things to happen at night: consider all the times that God delivered messages to sleepers in the Bible, through angelic visits and prophetic dreams: Jacob’s ladder; the Pharaoh’s dreams that the Patriarch Joseph was able to interpret to prepare Egypt for the

coming famine; the visits by angels in the dreams of Joseph the carpenter that directed him to wed Mary, and told how him to keep his family safe from Herod, and many, many more examples throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Once, I heard a melody in a dream that was so beautiful it made me cry, so I woke myself up and made sure I remembered it the next day. Some of you have heard “Rokko & Friends” perform the song “Chimes At Midnight” but you probably didn’t know it came to me in a dream! Choirs across America have sung this tune, including by the U.S.Army Chorus, but I didn’t really write it: I heard it in a dream and wrote it down. This is the tune on I played on piano today during our “Creatives Among Us’ montage. Do not underestimate the value of rest—including sleep—in the creative process!

A fourth kind of rest may not work for everybody, but is some people’s favorite: the midday nap! Many cultures, especially in hot climates, recognize the value of napping, or at least resting for awhile after lunch, so the “siesta” is built into the rhythm of the day in many parts of the world. We encourage napping for children, but the “power nap”— a short nap of 15 to 20 minutes—does wonders for many adults, allowing them to become re-charged and alert, and some people thrive with a longer nap of an hour or more in the afternoon.

A fifth type of rest I call “Centering.” This is the time you carve out every day to leave the outer world behind and focus on the Inward Journey where we approach the Divine in peace & quiet, and solitude. Centering slows down our breath and lets us get in touch with a deeper part of ourselves. Some folks make time for reading the

Bible or other spiritual writing; for contemplation and prayer; some practice Yoga as a way to teach the body to be still and in harmony with energy around us. A very direct way to practice centering is by finding a meditation method that suits you, for stilling your mind for a few minutes every day allows you to tap into the greater energy of the universe. Centering, like eating and sleeping, works best as a daily practice, and it is probably the most important kind of rest because by going within, we can truly go beyond ourselves; think of Jesus seeking quiet time on a mountaintop to be alone for awhile with His Father, the source of all Creativity.

Once, I sat down for a few minutes of meditation, but almost immediately a tune entered my head that I knew was just right for a “shepherd’s dance” for a Shakespeare play I was scoring. Now, usually, in meditation, we may notice a thought forming, and practice letting go of the thought, and so teach our racing minds to become quiet; this time I decided to hit the pause button on my meditation, took a minute to write down the melody; with that accomplished, I then went back to meditate. The melody that came to me is the penny-whistle tune we used in the “creatives among us” section today. Once again, an example in my life of a type of rest allowing the creative forces to manifest!

Rest number six is simply gathering with friends for the joy of companionship. Sitting around the table for a meal or a celebration, if done without stress, can take us away from the pressures of the day, and the pleasure of good company is easily combined with what I’ve called “play,”—whether music or games—or with “forest-bathing”—walking in the woods is a joy easily shared with a friend. So while

some types of rest are best done alone, there are some we can do with others.

The seventh and final type of rest on my list—like the daily practice of centering, or the habit of getting a few hours of shut-eye every night,—is also part of the rhythm of life: the weekly habit of observing the Sabbath. The word “sabbath” comes directly from “shabatt,” the Hebrew word for rest, and of course, one of the Ten Commandments reads: “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” Our observance of the Sabbath echoes our first Scripture reading from Genesis: God created the world and everything in it, and then rested on the seventh day.

Now Jesus and the Pharisees clashed more than once over the meaning of the Sabbath; over the centuries following Moses bringing down the tablets from Sinai, many rules had sprung up over the proper observance of the Sabbath, and Jesus seemed to violate these rules by engaging in the “work” of healing on these days, but remember that the original Commandment stresses keeping this day holy, which certainly Jesus did in every action he took. We can get bogged down in definitions—is playing the piano for a hymn on a Sunday “working”? Is preaching “working”? What about ushering in church?—obviously, these activities are permitted, as is helping an oxen that’s fallen in a ditch, to use one of the examples from Jesus. I can empathize with the Pharisees’ heightened concern about disrespect for the Sabbath—after all, the Prophets insisted it was Israel’s disregard for this holy day of the week that led to the triumphs of their enemies in years past. But always, Jesus asked us to look for the deeper meaning of things: the spirit of the law, not just the letter.

We take the seven-day week for granted, and it can be traced to the ancient Babylonians. I'm guessing it arose from the moon's cycle; each major phase of the moon is about 7 days apart; we also know the number seven had special meaning to the Babylonians because of the seven heavenly bodies they could see in the sky: the sun and moon and the five visible planets. The "seven-day week" was eventually adopted by the Hebrews and the Greeks, spread as far as India by Alexander the Great, and adopted for official use in Rome by the Emperor Constantine in 321, who made the "Day of the Sun" a legal holiday. Constantine changed history by decreeing tolerance for Christianity, and apparently part of the bargain was changing the Sabbath from Saturday, as Jesus observed it, to Sunday, which is the practice of most Christians today.

I find it very useful to make the Sabbath different from the other days of the week. By giving myself permission to set aside most tasks for another time, there is a "letting go" that takes place; that "to-do" list can be put in the drawer, and real relaxation can occur, allowing me to be refreshed and ready to go, come Monday morning—in fact, eager to get to projects still ahead. All days are holy, but we remember that in a special way on the Sabbath. We recognize the common sense in Commandments like "Thou Shalt Not Murder," "Thou Shalt Not Steal," "Honor Thy Father and Mother"—this Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath," makes just as much sense to me.

So that is the list of my seven favorite ways to rest. And so we complete the cycle of creativity we have described in the past weeks: dreaming of what might be, hovering in preparation, taking the risk

of beginning, listening with all our senses as we proceed, re-integrating our work as we approach completion, and resting to revitalize. But since this is a cycle, it does not end with rest, for in resting, dreaming can begin anew, and so the cycle of creativity repeats over and over.

Yes, God rested on the seventh day, but the work of Creation did not stop there. Remember: on the sixth day God created us: we are the sons and daughters of God. From that day on, things would be different; Our Father-Mother-Creator God would have us be co-creators here on earth, working hand in hand with the Divine to make the world a more beautiful, just, peaceful and loving place for all. Let us all aspire to be channels for God's creative energy, to make our dreams of a better world come to life.

Amen.