

A SERMON BY THE REVEREND ELIZABETH F. KEELER

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost



22 July 2018

2 Samuel 7:1-14a
Psalm 89:20-37
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

One of my favorite back to school traditions is the predictable assignment: *describe something you did this summer*. For little children this involves drawing a picture or bringing something in for show-and-tell, and then in later years writing an essay describing a summer experience. Even though my family didn't take exotic trips, I loved summertime and always looked forward to sharing a fun story and hearing about my classmate's summer adventures. Summer offers all of us, children and adults alike, a chance for new experiences including a different rhythm of life. Life is inescapably just a bit different in the summer – everything from less traffic and more available parking spots to the hotter temperatures and longer days. We all experience that there is a distinctive quality to our lives in these wonderful warm months.

One of the most basic gifts afforded us in summertime is a chance to rest and our Gospel story today opens with Jesus modeling appropriate rest and inviting his disciples to do the same. In Mark's fast paced Gospel, Jesus needs rest too, and in a nice touch, some "leisure even to eat." Jesus suggests this retreat time on the heels of the disciples returning from their mission adventures and reporting to Jesus all they had done. His first response to his weary followers is this: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

Many years ago, before I attended seminary, I managed to carve out three days for a much-needed silent retreat. I arrived exhausted and not even sure the effort to get away was worth whatever might be gained on the retreat. My wise spiritual director gave me one, and only one, assignment for those three quiet days. "Read the four Gospels" he suggested "and note every time Jesus goes away by himself to pray, or Jesus retreats to be alone, or Jesus calls others away for rest." In other words – take note of just how often Jesus honors alone time, rest, and quiet prayer. He went on to add – "If retreat time is important for our good Lord, then it's safe to say it's pretty important for us as well."

And so friends today I'd like for us to consider what's often been called the *rhythm of the Christian Life*, that cycle of engagement and retreat, how God ordained this pattern for us, and why it is so essential for our wellbeing.

Scottish theologian William Barkley points out that there are two dangers in life. First, there is the danger of constant activity and second, the counter side of that, the hazard of constant withdrawal. Constant activity is a far more common, I would say embedded, risk in the time and place in which we live and

move and have our being. The reality of being over-extended, chronically stretched too thin is familiar to far too many. And while we have some recognition that over functioning as a sustained mode of existence may be bad for our health or our relationships, I wonder if we acknowledge that the root cause of our angst when we neglect to rest is deeper than just physical or mental exhaustion? Most people can admit an awareness of going too hard, just flat out for too long, but do we connect our longing for rest and quiet with God? Do we associate our need for rest and quiet with our belief that we are made in the image of God? That we are part of the rhythm of a finely-tuned created order that God lovingly and magnificently set into motion?

Jesus said: Come you by yourselves away and rest for a while. Our instinct to slow down, to retreat into a quieter, slower pace, to rest, is a God given instinct that we ignore at our own peril. And the risk of ignoring that instinct has far wider reaching consequences than just fatigue. When we neglect the natural rhythm we were created to live by, one of work and rest, activity and retreat – we are neglecting God. We are unable to keep the two commandments that Jesus gave us – to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Again William Barclay offers a simple truth: Human beings cannot live the Christian Life unless they give themselves time to rest and time with God. And if our lives do seem out of control or disordered in some way the whole trouble may just be that we aren't giving ourselves that rest time. After all, how can we be recharged to love - love God, ourselves, one another - if we give God, the source of love, no time to renew us with spiritual energy and strength? How can we possibly shoulder life's burdens if we have no quiet time to consider and be with God who is the source of all that is right and good and just in the world? How can we possibly call ourselves followers of Christ, Christians, if we imagine we're above needing regular rest when even Jesus himself needed rest and calls us to that same rest and quiet?

The book of Ecclesiastes famously reminds us: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” Rhythms of life – Sabbath time, like summer, like sleep, like rest and quiet, are holy and necessary because they are ordained by God and embedded by God in creation and we are part of God's creation, made in God's holy image. We all need rest and quiet just as basically as we need air to breathe and food and water to live. Perhaps our experiences of rest and renewal this summer might be a reminder that the rhythm of engagement and retreat, of both work and rest, is how we are meant to live all the time, every day, in every season of our lives.

Amen.



CHRIST CHURCH GEORGETOWN

31st and O Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20007 | 202.333.6677
www.christchurchgeorgetown.org
info@christchurchgeorgetown.org

The Rev. Timothy A. R. Cole, Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth F. Keeler, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth B. Gardner, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Nicholas J. Evancho, Deacon & Seminarian