

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany (Year B)
St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Marcia M. Lockwood
Sunday, February 4, 2018
Text - Mark 1:29-35

God, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Have you ever thought about time, plain ordinary time? Time is a tricky subject. I went online looking for a definition, and the next thing I knew, I was into quantum physics!!! That's not what I had in mind! Time can be elusive. You can't hang onto it. It moves at it's own pace. You either have too much time or not enough time. Have you ever noticed, when you're busy, time seems to move fast. When nothing's happening, time takes forever! The thing is - we all have time, it's just a matter of how we spend it!

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The Sunday morning book group has been reading Wayne Muller's best seller, Sabbath. In a way you could say this book is about how people spend their time. But more than that, it's about how people spend their time consumed by their work. So much so, that at first I thought Muller was writing only about people who work in places like Wall St. People for whom work is their top priority. Surely, I thought, he couldn't be writing about people like us in Carmel Valley, who live pretty slow paced lives.

Well, it turns out he is writing about us. All of us! Because it doesn't matter whether you have a high powered job, do volunteer work, are raising kids, or even if you're retired. Every single one of us, has the propensity to get so caught up, in whatever we do, that we fail to allow time for the precious things in life.

Muller says, it's because we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. "All of life requires a 'rhythm of rest,' he says. There's a rhythm in our waking activity and our need for sleep. There's a rhythm between day and night, and night and day. There's a rhythm of how the growth of spring and summer is slowed down by the dormancy of fall and winter. There's a tidal rhythm, a conversation, if you will, between land and sea. Even in our bodies, our heart rests after each beat; and our lungs rest between each inhale and exhale."

And, he says, we've lost this rhythm, because our culture teaches us that work is more important. That action, accomplishments, and striving, are better than rest, that doing something - anything - is better than doing nothing! And as a result, we lose our way, and miss the quiet times that feed our souls. We miss the joy of spending time with those we love, going for a walk, to the beach, or just sitting quietly and reflecting on our lives. Here's the thing, if we believe that good things can come only through determination and hard work, we will never give ourselves permission to rest.

But how have we allowed ourselves to get so out of balance? Muller suggests that it's because we have forgotten the Sabbath! In the Jewish religion, everything stops when Sabbath begins. No one ever says, "Let me finish my work, then I'll begin the Sabbath." No! Everything stops when Sabbath begins, whether it's finished or not. Sabbath is a time to nourish the soul.

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Today we encounter Jesus after a long tiring day. First, he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, and that evening, he cured the sick of various diseases and casts out many demons. We are told, that the whole city was there watching from the door! We can only imagine how exhausted he must have been.

And what does Jesus do? The very next morning, while it is still very dark, he slips away to a lonely place before everyone is awake. A lonely place away from the crowd, and there he prays.

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For us, too, there can be nothing more wonderful than a lonely place. A lonely place where the phones do not ring and no one is competing for our attention. A lonely place where you can hear yourself think, feel your own breathing, rediscover your own inner rhythms. A lonely place where you can listen to the wind blowing through the trees, hear the sound of stillness around you. A lonely place free from the sound of television, computers, and iPhones. A place of tranquil rest.

Most of us yearn for such a place. For some, this lonely place is actually a place - the mountains, the beach, Garland Park. Point Lobos, even your garden, where you can sit and enjoy the beauty of God's work.

For others, a lonely place is really a place in time. A little solitude in your car between errands and appointments, that last cup of morning coffee, or the house silent after all others have gone to bed.

When I used to drive to Pacific Grove from the Carmel Valley Village area everyday, people at St. Mary's would say, "How can you possibly drive that far, day after day, as if they felt sorry for me." And I would reply, "I love that forty minute drive! I can plan my day, I can pray, I can work through problems, even ruminate over a sermon beginning to take form! For me, my car is my sanctuary!"

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In one simple sentence we are told, "In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up, went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed."

What better example do we have, than Jesus himself! He is always on the go, he is always teaching and healing, he is always there for people when they need him. But he also knows when it is time to stop, step away, and rest.

Some of you know I have a favorite prayer in the prayer book. It seems so appropriate here.

Let us pray.

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.