

Proper 11 Year B
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“Rest a while”

For the last two weeks I’ve ended my sermons by giving you little things to do during the week. Two weeks ago we looked at a list of virtues St. Paul gave us and I asked you to pick one and work on it.

Last week we talked about power and I asked you to pray this short prayer each day, “O Lord, grant me a knowledge of your will today and then give me the power to do it.”

Well for today I have good news and not so good news. The good news is that I have nothing to ask you to do this week. The not so good news is that the “nothing” I’m going to ask you to do may be more challenging than the things I have been asking you to do!

But first, let me back up a bit.

There was a news report this week that the French Parliament is considering changing the laws that keep stores closed on Sundays.

I was genuinely surprised that France, which has a much smaller active Christian population than the United States does, is only now considering legislation that we passed almost 40 years ago!

I remember very well when the Blue Laws, as we called them, were changed. Why? Because when I was a little boy and everything other than church was closed on Sundays, I hated Sundays and considered them the most boring day in the history of the universe! So I was glad when the laws were changed and there were things to do.

However, the French legislation has stiff opposition, because they see the way Americans run around like mad 7 days a week and many French don’t want to lose that one laid back day of the week.

Also, when my wife moved here from Northern Ireland, she was genuinely surprised at how American Christians would pile out of Church on a Sunday morning and head straight for the mall or wherever their busy day was going to take them. When we first started dating, one of the little jokes between us was that, after Church, I’d ask her what she wanted to do, and she would belt out: “No commerce on the Sabbath!”

And that is the word I want to focus on today: Sabbath. Now, I would always respond to Rose by saying that, technically, in the Bible, the Sabbath is actually Saturday, not Sunday. I sometimes also pointed out that Jesus got in a lot of trouble during his ministry for violating the Sabbath laws by teaching or healing on the Sabbath, when Jewish law required that you should cease from all activity. But Jesus felt that doing good was more important than following the law. Jesus said, “The Sabbath is for the people, not the

people for the Sabbath.” In other words, the Sabbath is not a law as much as it is a human need.

“Sabbath” is a Hebrew word which simply means “rest,” so when the 4th of the 10 commandments says: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day,” God is commanding us to rest because God knows that rest is a universal human need.

So when I began this sermon by saying that I had nothing for you to do this week, but that the nothing I have for you to do may be quite challenging, what I meant is that this week the spiritual discipline to work on is rest. Look at your calendars, and if your days are too busy, cancel something and reclaim that time for God and for rest.

Today in America studies have shown that the average teenage is sleep deprived. And television is filled with commercials about pills that are supposed to help us relax and sleep so we can get up the next day and continue our stress filled lives. As Christians, we need to know that God does not desire us to live at a frantic pace, God desires us to live lives that are balanced between activity and rest.

We see this in today’s gospel. The apostles had just returned from a mission trip Jesus had sent them on. It was exciting no doubt, but also exhausting. So Jesus said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” And then, by the time we come to the end of the lesson, they’re back at it again, with people rushing Jesus and grabbing at his cloak.

Jesus’ entire ministry is marked by this pattern of intense activity followed by retreat and rest. And while we Americans are quite good at intense activity, where we fall short is that we often fail to balance that activity with a Sabbath time of rest.

And I’m not telling you when to do nothing. Some people have to work Sundays (like me), and when you have kids to chase around there are constant demands. But balance is the Christian goal, and for most of us that will require slowing down and turning the racket off in our heads long enough to be still and thank God for our lives, our friends, our families, our church, the beauty of nature, whatever helps us to get the rest we need.

“Come away to a deserted place and rest a while,” Jesus said. And if your days are moving too fast even in the middle of summer, take Jesus’ words to heart, cancel a few things, and regain your balance. AMEN