

## **“Too Pressed to Rest?”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

July 21, 2024 - Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

[2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56](#)

I hope that you've been able to enjoy some of the truly lovely weather we have been experiencing here so far this weekend. While summer days here in New England can get pretty hot and muggy, they can also be quite wonderful, like yesterday was and today is looking to be, and I hope that you are able to make the most of these good days and that how you spend your time in them rejuvenates your soul.

Finding soul rejuvenating times of rest is a theme found in both of our scripture lessons for today. In our first reading from 2 Samuel, which continues the series of lessons about Israel's first kings, we find King David towards the end of his earthly days, finally resting in his own house after spending so much of his life living in tents or open fields with his warring armies and, in the days of his youth, with his wandering sheep. David, finally resting in his own house of cedar, considers making a permanent house for the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence that housed the ten commandments, which had always been kept in a tent as it traveled with the Israelites, from the time that Moses led them in the wilderness to those days when David was growing his kingdom in Palestine. God's response to David was that he would not be the one to build a house for God, for Israel's unseen, living God cannot really be boxed in and manipulated like the lifeless, powerless gods of stone and wood that Israel's neighbors housed in human-fashioned temples, but that God would build a house for David -- also not one of stone or wood, but a living household -- and God declared that one of the members of this house of David would be the one to build a permanent house in which God's ark would rest and where people could gather and be rejuvenated as they worshipped God.

Our gospel lesson from Mark also tells about rest and rejuvenation. In the reading, we heard that David's descendent Jesus sought a moment of rest for himself and his disciples. They had been hard at work, healing and teaching people throughout Galilee, and so they got in a boat together and headed out to find a quiet place somewhere along the Sea of Galilee's shores where they could

have some rejuvenating downtime. That was the plan anyway. The people of Galilee had other plans, for many of them had heard about Jesus and his disciples and their healing work, and great crowds tracked their boat's progress from the shore and were there waiting for them as soon as they stepped foot on land. Moved by compassion for these people in need, Jesus did not shoo them away, scold them for stalking him, or beg them for just a minute of peace and quiet; rather he resumed his healing and teaching work, which continued wherever he went as more and more people brought ill loved ones to Jesus, that they might be healed and rejuvenated just by touching his garment or being in his presence.

The mercy and grace of God is hard to box in, even for Jesus and his disciples, who desired just a little r-n-r time for themselves rather than continually meting out mercy or giving others grace. Surely, they must have found some time away from the crowds, when they themselves were rejuvenated by God's unboxed mercy and grace. Perhaps while they were going from one place to another, they found unplanned, unexpected moments of peace and quiet, resting together in their boat on the lake, or enjoying joyful comradery while sharing a meal, or taking in scenic vistas while out on the road. Surely they also planned time to be rejuvenated to make up for the unexpected and unplanned times when the crowds pressed them into duty.

One of the funny things about people is they, like God, are hard to box in. People will not get hungry or ill or suffer some injustice or otherwise be in need of mercy and grace according to your schedule. Sometimes enacting God's love for people will require for you to *adjust* your own schedule, maybe even giving up some of your own down time or other resources to serve your neighbor. When this happens, perhaps you could thank God for the blessing of an unplanned opportunity to offer Christ's real healing touch as it is needed in a moment.

And if your plans are changed to do good for others, find ways to change your plans further, to make time to do what is good for yourself. For just as we are instructed when flying in an aircraft to put on our own oxygen mask in an emergency situation before assisting others with theirs, you must find or make moments to take in God's healing, rejuvenating mercy and grace in your own life, so that you can then be ready and able to help others in their times of need. Maybe that means you commit to showing up here on Sundays at 10 a.m. or you

make sacred some other scheduled spiritual practice or discipline. Maybe that means you take advantage of some unplanned opening in your schedule to make it a moment for life-giving rest rather than just filling it was some other distracting or peace-robbing activity. Even if you feel too pressed to rest, that there is always just too much to be done to take any time off, and that even my recommendation for you to find time to rest stresses you out, you must find ways to pause and breathe in God's life for the good of others and for your own well-being.

Today, dear friends, on this beautiful summer day, may you find such moments for Sabbath rest, may you make these throughout this good season, may they be part of all of your days to come, and may you find in these moments of rest God filling your heart with life and peace. Amen.