

## ***“Sabbath Time”***

### ***A Sermon***

***by Reverend Bill Clark***

In November of 1994, Neil Rudenstine, President of Harvard University, overslept one morning. For this zealous perfectionist, in the middle of a million-dollar-a-day fundraising campaign, it was cause for alarm. After years of intensive, non-stop toil and struggle, in an atmosphere that continually rewarded frantic busyness and over work, and having been assaulted by a hail of never-finished tasks, President Rudenstine collapsed. That week his picture appeared on the cover of Time magazine beside the one word banner – Exhausted!! (Sabbath: Muller; 1999. Pg. 4)

Exhausted! I wonder how many of us have ever felt that way – exhausted? Especially now after the frenzy of the holiday season – we may still be feeling exhausted!

How many of us can relate to waking up in a panic because we overslept and missed – a meeting – an appointment or a major fund-raiser? Okay, perhaps we are not President of an Ivy League University doing million dollar a day campaigns, but we are teachers, preachers, business owners and operators, congregants, community people and professionals – all hard-working, individuals trying to juggle the many elements to this fast-paced life we have created for ourselves. Some, on this beautiful

Island we call home, are retired and yet may find their days are still filled with overwhelming busyness and scheduling.

Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, suggested that human life and liberty were intimately entwined with the pursuit of happiness – happiness not busyness. Instead, life has become a whirlwind in which speed and accomplishments, consumption and productivity have become the most valued human commodities. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi *“There is more to life than increasing its speed.”*

So all of this begs the question: What are we doing? What are we doing to ourselves and our society if we are continually running after things – chasing after our goals; our dreams and our fortune.

It is like the story of Rabbi Levi, who saw a man running in the street and asked him, “Why do you run so?”

The man replied, “I am running after my good fortune!”

Rabbi Levi tells him, “Silly man, your good fortune has been trying to chase you, but you are running too fast.”

Perhaps we are all running too fast – chasing our dreams, running from one appointment or job to the next (especially here in the summer time), or running to one meeting, one appointment after the other and always, always on the go. It feels like we are becoming the white rabbit....

*“I’m late; I’m late for a very important date.”*

“There is a pervasive form of contemporary **violence**,” writes Thomas Merton, “{and that is} activism and overwork.”

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit one-self to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence.”

“To succumb to violence.” I have never thought of my busyness and over scheduling as a form of violence. When my day is full of scheduled appointments and those always “important meetings” then, naturally, I feel I am doing my job – and a good job at that! I remember in my first years of ministry I thought I was so clever and scheduled all of my pastoral appointments on one day. By the end of that day I was absolutely useless to anyone – especially myself. I would leave the church office in a fog and daze and return home and collapse – exhausted!!

In our haste to succeed – in our haste to achieve – in our haste and hurry to move forward to the next goal or the next meeting or the next crisis – have we have lost sight to the ideal of rest – to rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives, to resist the headlong tumble into the next moment?

Author Wayne Muller, claims we have lost the rhythm of rest – actually he calls it the sacred rhythm of rest – or Sabbath time.

In his book, *Sabbath Time: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* Muller, suggests that we have lost the ideal a Sabbath. “While Sabbath can refer to a single day of the week,” Muller writes, “Sabbath can also be a far-reaching, revolutionary tool for cultivating those precious human qualities that grow only in time.” (Sabbath: p. 5)

If filling our time with busyness and hurriedness can become a kind of violence then certainly our imaginative and creative thinking can stretch our perception to see that Sabbath time – effortless and nourishing rest – can invite a healing of this violence. Sabbath time is pausing – for a moment – for a hour – for a day or heck even for a week and taking personal, Sabbath Time, to restore one’s spirit or soul from the frantic fast pace of everyday life.

Colleague Robert Weston writes; “What of ourselves? There could be now, deep peace, a time for soul searching; we might turn to examine our own lives, to sort and probe our tendencies of thought.”

And as we probe these tendencies of thought what do we find? Perhaps we find; the monkey mind – jumping from thought to thought – plan to plan – goal to goal? Or the wandering mind drifting from what to wear to what and when to eat? Or the

steadfast mind – focusing on the simplest of task – the awareness of your own breath?

Sabbath time is nothing more than allowing time and space for peaceful, calm reflection on who you are, what are your gifts and how you may use these gifts to create more peace and loving kindness in your own life?

I love our second reading as it suggests how we may go about this work. “Imagine setting it all down – papers, plans, appointments, everything – leaving only a note; Gone to the fields to be lovely. Be back when I’m through blooming.”

This is truly enjoying the passing of time. And it may be the secret of life – taking the time to lie down in the fields and waiting to bloom – taking Sabbath Time.

Yet we do have this opportunity here as well. Except, rather than a field of lilies we have all of this - all of this beauty – this amazing winter beauty, Yes let us not rush away winter. It is a season to itself and not simply the way to spring.

And we have this home for all seasons. We have this Island. “Gone to Vineyard to be lovely. Be back when I am through blooming.”

This idea of going off to the fields to be lovely is Sabbath Time. “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath.” For me this definitely means more than going to church on Sunday. Sabbath time is taking time restoring the sacred rhythm of REST. Muller

writes; “Sabbath time can be revolutionary to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities and accomplishments.”

For part of the holidays I was up in Maine. My parents left us their retirement home in Kennebunkport, Maine. We gather there on holidays with my six siblings their families, nieces and nephews; great nephews and cousins with their kids. It’s family time. It is exhausting!

I found that if I took some time –and walked down to the end of the road with the view of the bay, the boats, the lighthouse and just sat – sat and looked out and just got lost in the beauty that surrounded me – I was able to return to the family gathering – refreshed and restored and ready to take on whatever my beloved family would throw at me – and trust me I come from a family of throwers – insults – sarcasms – and repeated Republican rhetoric. My time looking out onto the natural beauty of the Maine coastline was my “gone to the fields to be lovely” –It was my time to regroup, restore and replenish a withered spirit. It was Sabbath time.

So, perhaps as a new year’s resolution or simply something anew to try, lets allow ourselves some natural and nourishing time for renewal and reflection. Make time in the busyness of your days to pause, a busy rest perhaps and to breathe in the

beauty that is all around us and find your own personal Sabbath time. The Tao-Te Ching states it this way;

*Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?*

Can we all simply slow down – breathe – take some time for the next adventure to arise and deep breathe again – and take some time for your heart, mind and soul.

There is a sociologist who tells the wonderful story of a South American tribe that went on a long march, day after day, when all of sudden they would stop walking, sit down to rest for a while, and then make camp for a couple of days before going any farther. When she asked why, why they stopped to make camp; they explained that they needed the time of rest so that their souls could catch up with them.

My friends, let us rest here this week to allow our souls to catch up so we can go to the fields to be lovely and bloom!!

Amen and Blessed Be.

My friends,

When our heart is in a holy place our soul follows suit.

May we rest in this place of holiness.