

# **Trinity United Methodist Church**

**September 15, 2019**

**“Back to School/Lessons from Kindergarten –**

**Nap Time: It’s Mandatory”**

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## **Scripture: Mark 2:23-28**

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

## **Sermon**

Let us pray. Open our ears and our hearts, oh Lord. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

So we’re starting this Back to School sermon series, last week with Picture Day: Trying to Look Perfect when we (definitely) are Not Perfect, so you saw some funny pictures last week. Well, this week we’re talking about one of the things that I miss most of all from kindergarten, and that is Nap Time. Nap time was fabulous, pulling out the carpet squares. We didn’t have to sleep, but we at least had to be quiet. And the problem with that was that I, like most kids, didn’t *want* to take a nap or even be quiet. In fact, I was usually the one getting in trouble for laughing or giggling or making other kids make noise and laugh and giggle. *Me? Never. I would never do that.*

But there’s something innate about most kids in that they don’t want to rest. They don’t want to nap. They don’t want to do quiet time. Most of the time we have to make them do so or help them into that time of day. But as we mature, we start to realize the



benefit of a great nap. Amen? Or rest, or even quiet time. So indeed, if there's anything I miss the most about kindergarten, it's that mandatory quiet or nap time.

You may have heard of other countries, Spain in particular, in which it's part of their culture, where they shut down in the middle of the day. Shops, businesses, companies close in the early afternoon so that everyone can take a long lunch and grab maybe a 30-minute nap or so. To the point that companies here in America have realized the boost in productivity and in creativity that a nap can give an employee, to the point that companies like Google have built "rest lounges" for their employees to go and grab some quick shut-eye in the middle of the day. Here lately I've seen advertisements for nap desks, where it's like a curved feature underneath your desk that you can literally crawl up under it in the middle of the day and zonk out for a few minutes to get that power nap. You know, those of y'all that work at the shipyard or Smithfield Foods, maybe you should mention that to Corporate. Maybe it'll work. Who knows, indeed.

But we know the effects, research has shown over and over, the positive effects of naps and of getting good rest. We have more energy, we have more creativity, greater focus. We're more positive and upbeat, and we typically feel refreshed. Of course, then the contrary is true as well. When we don't get that proper rest, we feel drained. We can't focus. We feel lethargic, we get cranky, we get grouchy, and our fuse gets a lot shorter. Amen? Yeah. Mine does, definitely.

But as with physical health, so often goes our spiritual health. When we don't practice good physical health, like exercise and healthy eating and proper rest, our bodies will tell us, often in negative ways. We gain unhealthy weight. We develop illness more quickly and easily. We're more irritable. And if you're like me, you go and you go and you go and you go and you go, until your body finally just shuts down as if to say, "If you're not going to take a break, I'm going to take a break for you."

But when we don't practice good spiritual health also, by our spiritual disciplines, by regular prayer, by regular searching the Scriptures and regular corporate worship, our souls let us know as well, often in very negative ways. We find that we might get more critical or cynical. We might get more prideful. We might get more restless. We focus more on that unholy trinity of "me, myself and I." And it's amazing how much our physical health is connected with our spiritual health, how much they're intertwined. So much so that if we're not taking care of ourselves physically, pay attention – chances are we're not taking care of ourselves spiritually, either. I know that's the case for me nearly every time I notice those patterns creeping up in my life.

But if we do take care of ourselves physically, especially if we get that good, proper rest, then we're able to better attend to ourselves spiritually. We're more alert to God's presence in our life. We can concentrate more in prayer. Have you ever gone to



start praying and you're so drop-dead tired that you don't dare close your eyes to pray because you know that the minute you do, you're going to be, "God, thank you for...(snoring sound)," and you're going to be out like a light.

Bishop Cho, who was then my district superintendent, once led a group of us clergy in reading a book by E.M. Bounds called *The Power of Prayer*. It's an old spiritual classic, a great, great book. And E.M. Bounds speaks early of the importance, the necessity even, of rising early in the morning to pray, like 5 a.m. or even earlier. And Bishop Cho is known as a man who rises at least that early every single morning to spend at least an hour in prayer every single day. And so in this clergy group we're talking about the many excuses we have not to get up that early and pray, etc., and someone asked him, "Dr. Cho, how do you do it?" He said, "It's easy. It all starts the night before, with going to bed at a decent time and getting a good night's rest."

You see, there's many excuses that we have to just keep going and going and going and going and going, but there is a reason that the Energizer Bunny is a fictional character in a commercial. Because we might say "there's no rest for the weary," but maybe God knew what God was doing by resting on the Sabbath day, on the seventh day of creation. He led us by example, to the point that He even made it one of the Big Ten commandments. "You shall keep the Sabbath holy." Keep it set apart. Don't let anything interfere with your Sabbath rest.

Over time, this led the Jewish people to keeping the practice of Sabbath from sundown on Friday through sundown on Saturday, and to developing all kinds of regulations of what constituted work on the Sabbath, to the point that all the food consumed during that time period on Saturday had to be prepared ahead of time on Friday. You couldn't cook on the Sabbath. There was no traveling, certainly walking over a certain distance on the Sabbath; that would be considered work. And even to the point that even today, if you go and visit in Israel, in many of the hotels in Israel, on the Sabbath day, they turn one of the elevators into the "Sabbath elevator." And we were told as tourists, "Don't get on that elevator unless you want to stop at every single floor on the way up and every single floor on the way down." Because, for the strictest observance of the Jewish faith that live in Israel, even pushing the button of your floor is considered to be work on the Sabbath. So you just get on the Sabbath elevator and you just get off at whatever floor you're on. It just automatically does it for you. So they told us as tourists, "Unless you just want that cultural experience, you're going to get really annoyed by it."

Well, Jesus and his disciples got into trouble on the Sabbath, as we read from Mark 2 today. And Jesus and his disciples are in trouble because it's the Sabbath and they are out walking in the fields of grain. And just by walking out where they are, they've already broken the rule about walking over a certain distance. And so they are out there and His disciples get hungry, so they start plucking heads of grain as they're



walking along and rubbing it between their fingers and getting the seeds out and consuming them. And the Pharisees are able to see this and, of course, they start criticizing them. But here's the thing: If Jesus and His disciples are already out far enough that they've broken the law of walking over a certain distance, how in the world did the Pharisees not break that law to get close enough to see the disciples plucking heads of grain and consuming them? But nevertheless they criticize, they ask Jesus about it. And Jesus reminds them from their own Scripture and their own history how David himself broke the law to meet human need. David and his men were out in battle. They got famished and so they came upon a tabernacle and they ended up taking the consecrated bread that was meant to be eaten only by the high priest, and they took it and distributed it amongst themselves so that they could continue fighting. Even King David himself broke one of these laws, at least one.

But then Jesus tempered this commandment and these Sabbath expectations. He said basically yes, on the one hand, "Keep the Sabbath holy by resting" is one of the Big Ten. It's pretty mandatory. God says "You have to take a time out. You have to rest. You have to have some down time." But Jesus says basically, if we're more caught up in the laws, in the *do's* and *don'ts* of the Sabbath, more so than we are in just focusing on resting in the presence of God, then we're really missing the point of it all. Jesus says Sabbath rest is ultimately for our human benefit, to reconnect as branches on the vine.

Practically, he says keeping Sabbath helps us in our time management. For it says in Exodus 20, which gives us the list of the Ten Commandments, and keeping the Sabbath is one of them – It says you have six days each week for your ordinary work. So keeping the Sabbath helps us reframe our mindset about time. From "how in the world am I going to take that much time off when there's so much to do?" to "Wow! I've got six whole days to do that which needs to be done!" How can we prioritize and get what needs to be done in that time frame instead of focusing on the lack of time that keeping time set aside for Sabbath would have for us?

Keeping Sabbath is about doing that which re-energizes and refreshes our spirit. It's more than just taking a day off. That's a good start, but it's also about doing that which refreshes us and helps us connect with God. So many times on our days off we're stuck doing the honey-do lists or whatever needs to be done around the house. And if some of that work refreshes your spirit – If tidying the house helps you feel more at peace, then by all means tidy your house. For me, yard work actually refreshes my spirit, because so much of ministry work is intangible. I visit people, I talk with people all day, and at the end of some days all I've done is talk with people all day and I can look back and go, "Wow, what did I get done today?" Whereas when I'm cutting my grass, I can see how much I have done and how much I have yet to do, and then when it's all done I can sit back on my deck with a nice cold beverage and look out upon all that I have done for the day, and that's refreshing to me. Someone came out at 8:30 and said,



“watch out, you might get more invitations to do more yard work.” No, that is not the case. But in other words, it’s not about the specifics, it’s doing that which refreshes your spirit and also helps you connect with God.

But the caveat there is we also have to beware of things like just lounging around all day aimlessly, just vegging out in front of the TV or playing video games all day. There has been research of the adverse effects of that kind of activity on us. Sabbath keeping is also productive in what we do with God for that time.

Our personalities can play out in how we keep Sabbath as well. For introverts to be out in a crowded setting with a group of people doing something or whatever, that might not be Sabbath, because that tends to drive us a little nuts. But at the same time, for an extrovert to focus the Sabbath as only finding solitude and being just by yourself with you and God, that might drive you just as batty as well. So do what works for you.

And then lastly, we can do Sabbath with other people, in particular our family members. One of the things I will always remember is, Chloe was 2, maybe 3. She was just toddling, just beginning to talk. And one morning I got up early, got my coffee, my Bible, my devotion book and settled down in my recliner. I was going to have my quiet time for the morning with God, a little bit of Sabbath time there. And she came down the hallway and she brought a toy over to me and she started saying, “Daddy, play with me. Daddy, play with me.” And so I literally prayed, “God, what is up with this? I’m trying to focus on you, I’m trying to have quiet time with you” – I’m an only child too, by the way. So I tried to send her over to the corner, “go play with your toys over there.” And God about literally hit me upside the head with a 2x4 and said, “Idiot” – no, I don’t think God called me an idiot, but – “what do you think is a better way of spending time with Me than to spend time with your daughter, who won’t always want you to play with her?” *All right, God. Yes, I get it. Thank you.*

But there is one final important component of Sabbath to practice at least from time to time, and that is to find time for silence and for solitude. To make time to hear and listen and tune in to the still, small voice of God, which leads to the final point. Again, Sabbath is not about rules and set times and “do this and don’t do that,” things that we get hung up about. Because Jesus said the Son of Man is Lord *even* of the Sabbath. And if the Son of Man, Jesus is Lord, then that means Jesus is in charge. If Jesus is in charge of the Sabbath, then Jesus ultimately sets the agenda and not us. So when we begin our Sabbath time, maybe ask, “Jesus, what do you want to do today?” It’s a great prayer to start off any morning, truly. But to ask that in prayer as we begin the Sabbath time. And whatever you do, to rest in the presence of the Spirit of God. Even in washing the dishes.

Brother Lawrence was a monk in a monastery who wrote an ancient Christian book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. It’s a short little book, a real easy read,



but he talks about finding the presence of God, not necessarily in the corporate times of prayer and all the other monk things that they did, but he found the presence of God most specifically for him in doing the dishes.

So I asked the question on Facebook a few years ago, “What happened to nap time in kindergarten?” Because Chloe came through kindergarten and she didn’t have nap time. Mark went through half-day kindergarten and they had to cram a whole day of kindergarten into half a day in northern Virginia, and so there was certainly no nap time there. What happened to mandatory naptime that I had when I was a kid? And basically as Standards of Learning have developed and all the things that they have to get kindergarteners to do – they come home and I’m like, “I don’t remember learning that stuff in kindergarten!” It’s all those standards that we make our kids meet these days.

But for many of us somewhere along the way, rest became optional, too. The expectation to *just keep going no matter what* pervades our society. “You can sleep when you’re dead,” I’ve often said, for there is indeed way too much to do. But that’s one last benefit of Sabbath rest. It helps us remember that we’re not as important as we think we are. Because if God could take a day off from Creation and just sit back and enjoy and the whole thing didn’t go to you-know-where in a handbasket ... don’t you think we could do the same thing?

When I started seminary, a professor said to us student pastors, “At the end of the day, you will find that there is always one more thing to do. One more phone call to make, one more visit to make, one more sermon to write, one more meeting to run, one more whatever. There is always one more thing to do.” He said, “but at the end of the day, give it to God and go to bed.”

What do you need to just give to God and take a break? To take a Sabbath rest? After all, God says it’s mandatory.

Thanks be to God. Amen.