

Sunday, Sept 11, 2016 - I'm So Busy: A Cult of Productivity + Fear of Rest

Exodus 20:8-11

Marysville United Methodist Church

In 1967, experts on time management delivered a report to the U.S. Senate. These experts believed the speed of technology, satellites, and robotics would present a big problem for the American workplace in the years to come. The problem? People would have too much free time. Here's a quote from the report. "By 1985, people might have to choose between working 22 hours a week, 27 weeks a year, or retiring at 38." The "experts" nailed that one (Powell).

We know today, that did **not** happen.

Increased speeds in technology have, in fact, decreased free time. The "experts" didn't anticipate us filling in the productivity gaps with...more productivity. But we did. And today, **we are addicted to speed**.

This addiction is so prevalent, it's been given a name...hurry sickness. Hurry sickness is "*a continuous struggle to accomplish more things and participate in more events in less time.*"

Are you addicted to speed, productivity and efficiency? I am. Which is why we need the church to remind us this relationship to speed and hurry is **not** of God. We made this. And it's slowly destroying us.

Today, we're going to dig deeper into our cultural obsession with productivity, what we think success is and our fear of rest. We'll end with God's invitation and solution to this nightmare we find ourselves in. Then we'll spend the next two weeks unpacking Sabbath and what it actually looks like in our lives.

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. All life requires a rhythm of rest. There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body's need for sleep. There is a rhythm in the way day dissolves into night, and night into morning. There is a rhythm as the active growth of spring and summer is quieted by the necessary dormancy of fall and winter.

There is a tidal rhythm, a deep, eternal conversation between the land and the great sea. In our bodies, the heart rests after each life-giving beat; the lungs rest between the exhale and the inhale. We have lost this essential rhythm.

Our culture supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something—anything— is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. (Muller)

Wayne Muller wrote "Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives," and shares this: "A "successful" life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits;

war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company;

war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us;

war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous;

war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks.”

Despite our good hearts and equally good intentions, our work in the world rarely feels light, pleasant, or healing. Instead, as it all piles endlessly upon itself, the whole experience of being alive begins to melt into one enormous obligation. It becomes the standard greeting everywhere: I am so busy.

We say this to one another with no small degree of pride, as if our exhaustion were a trophy, our ability to withstand stress a mark of real character. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even to know that the sun has set at all), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single, mindful breath, this has become the model of a successful life. (Muller)

This is not sustainable. It's not okay. It is a sinful way to live. And it's normal and expected in our culture today. We feel powerless to slow our lives down.

Some of you know I've struggled with panic and anxiety in the past. It still catches me off guard once in awhile but I've done the interior work and have the tools to respond better now. I'll never forget being at one of my lowest points and moving through my days with great fear and dread. I had to do something to get better. To become more whole. I knew it was time to do the very thing I had avoided for years.

See in the “spiritual life,” we talk a lot about getting quiet and meditating and listening to God in deep prayer. Throughout seminary, we had opportunities to practice this kind of stillness and I did not like it. I would look down and pretend to close my eyes. I would bounce my leg, move my fingers, shift in my chair, waiting for the chime to ring, which meant it was time to return to the people in the room and talk about what we experienced. I really did not like this. I felt connected to God in nature and by the water but struggled with pure silence. Just sitting there and doing nothing. But part of me knew there was healing and wholeness there.

Fast forward to one of my low points and I finally decided it was time to try meditation for real. I found a spiritual director who would walk me through it and help me process how it felt. And I remember feeling panicky and anxious the first time. I wanted to get out of that room so bad. **I was simply terrified to slow down.** I was scared of the voices in my head that were so self-critical, mean, and loud. In some ways, I had a fear of rest. But mostly, I didn't know how to rest.

Anyone with me?

So I got a therapist and intentionally stepped into a season of figuring out what would happen if I got quiet enough to listen to my life. I was ready to move into the unknown of my thoughts, my feelings and reactions. How was it that I could proclaim a gospel on Sunday mornings of trust, peace, grace and abundance, and find myself literally unable to slow down long enough to listen deeply to God the rest of the time? If anything, it's another reminder that God works well in our weaknesses. I literally have given sermons while experiencing a panic attack. And people would come up afterwards and say, “That message really helped me. It was like God was talking right to me.” Really? Okay, that was clearly God. We don't need to have it all together before God will use us to help someone else. I love that.

So I got quiet. And I didn't die.

I learned (and I'm still learning today) I didn't have to be afraid of rest and slowing down my pace. And that the very key to a rich and faith-filled life with God, others and myself is found in being able to slow down and simply be present.

We'll talk more in depth about Sabbath rhythms next week. But first, in life, I don't think we can figure out how to handle something until we realize **why** it got this way.

Why do we think life has come to this? **Who is the inner hustle really for?** Is it to impress other people? To feel good about our time on earth? To make a difference? To prove we have value? To avoid something we don't want to deal with? I encourage you to practice some silence and meditation this week. Talk and listen with God about why your inner hustle exists.

As followers of Jesus, we look to his life for wisdom and direction. We don't see evidence of Jesus rushing, anywhere. He didn't cater to the demands of the culture. Even though he had an enormous mission to complete in a short period of time, we don't see him getting overwhelmed or anxious. Jesus had the weight of the world on his shoulders, literally, but he didn't allow it to crush him.

Could it be that faster doesn't equal better? Is it possible that the fast life doesn't lead to the good life? I think so.

Hurriedness isn't from God. As psychiatrist Carl Jung said, "Hurry is not OF the devil. Hurry IS the devil." (Powell)

So friends, are you ready to spend a couple weeks of prayer and reflection around the pace in your life?

If so, we have a wonderful guide in this journey. The very One who created us and who is longing for us to slow down, to notice the Divine in every nook and cranny of our beautiful life. To stop rushing past holy moments. To get a better relationship with our insane to do lists that rule us. And to breathe deeply of grace and rest.

Here these words today from the book of Exodus. Commandments from our God given to Moses and to us.

Exodus 20:8-11: Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy.

Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you.

Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day.

That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Jen Hatmaker reminds us, "**We belong to a culture that can't catch its breath; rather, we refuse to catch our breath. God doesn't pull any punches here: The Sabbath is holy. Not lazy, not selfish, not unproductive; not helpful, not optional, not just a good idea. Holy.**"

As we each continue to follow Jesus, may Sabbath, true rest, continue to grow in our hearts, calendars and rhythms. Our work together continues. Amen!