2 Samuel 7:1-14a

1Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2the king said to the prophet Nathan, ‘See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.’3Nathan said to the king, ‘Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.’

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan:5Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.7Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders\* of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’ 8Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 9and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.10And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly,11from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.12When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.13He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.14I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Mark 6:30-32

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.31He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.32And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Listen to Jesus: Take a Rest

I know that I’m asking for trouble when I title a sermon “Listen to Jesus: Take a Rest.” Now if anyone falls asleep during the worship service you can just say that you’re following Jesus’ orders, right? Hence I better rename this sermon…

Take a Rest with Jesus

Generally speaking, we Christians are a busy lot, which may be why we often associate church with coffee – right now there must literally be tankers of coffee brewing across the Eastern United States as Worship Services are shifting to Social Hours and people like me can restore our caffeine level in our bloodstream. If, during social hour, we ask anyone, “What did you do this week?” you would likely get a long response. You’d talk about work, and even if you don’t work, you’d talk about projects around the house, people you visit, and places you travelled. People who are active in the church will talk about meetings, and bookkeeping and preparing and serving food, and Bible Studies, prayer groups, outreach and mission. We Methodists are among the busiest; our founding fathers and mothers had a reputation for attending 5 a.m. prayer meetings, for visiting hospitals and prisons and orphanages and work houses on top of all their prayer meetings and revivals and Bible Studies. And we Americans are known for our work ethic; we invented Red Bull and the 5-Hour Energy Drink. We will sometimes work two or three jobs, go to school at nights or on weekends while trying to maintain a marriage and a family. So to be both Methodist and American is an explosive combination!

There was a recent study done at UCLA that observed the lifestyle of 32 middle class families in the Los Angeles area.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among the conclusions: The subjects were so consumed with working, that they actually spent very little time together enjoying what they were working for. As reported by the *Boston Globe*, Jeanne E. Arnold, lead author and a professor of anthropology at UCLA, shared her particular dismay at how little time family members spent outside: "Something like 50 of the 64 parents in our study never stepped outside in the course of about a week," she said. "When they gave us tours of their house they'd say, 'Here's the backyard, I don't have time to go there.'”[[2]](#footnote-2) Pastor David Lose conjectures that we are so consumed with the notion of success that we don’t limit our work. “We are enslaved to the belief that the only thing that will bring contentment is more -- more money, more space in our homes, more cars, more things to put on our resumes or in our closets, more.... Go ahead, name that thing you've fallen prey to wanting more of. And such levels of wanting, quite frankly, don't permit much time for anything but work.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

And if the things we want are also things that consume our time yet fail to give us rest, we dig ourselves an even deeper hole. Now you’re working long hours to have things that will keep you busy in your free time. . I remember a guy I knew in college back in 1982 when cable television was brand new and you had 99 stations on 24 hours. He had to drop out of college because he couldn’t rest – there was always something interesting to watch. I remember watching cable all night on several occasions when it was new. Watching TV is not resting.

*Rest* is something that we simply don’t place on our “to do” list, which is too bad, because we really should. God has actually commanded us to take rest: “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy” (Deuteronomy 5:12). It was not an option. Of all the commandments, you might think this one we could keep, yet we don’t. Why not? The problem, as all problems, can be traced to our relationship with God. There are, as I mentioned, plenty of Christian workaholics. David may be seen as a workaholic; in today’s Old Testament Reading, David is in Jerusalem having just come back from defeating the dreaded Philistines, he has organized the transport of the Ark of the Covenant from Ba`aley Yĕhuwdah to the capital, and he probably hasn’t even taken a shower yet when he says, “I’ve got to build a house for God.” Nathan the Prophet thinks it’s a good idea. But God speaks to Nathan in a dream and says, “Hold on there! I’ve done just fine for the past trillion years without a house. How ‘bout I build you a house?” And God orders David *not* to build him a house.

Perhaps if David had spent a little more time resting, he might have a clear enough mind not to mess around with the wife of one of his generals. Perhaps if he had spent a little quiet time away from things he wouldn’t have planned the murder of that general. Perhaps his mind would have been a little clearer.

Because rest is not really doing nothing. God commands us to take rest on the Sabbath “to keep it holy.” What does that mean? It means that it is not simply recreation. It’s time that is to be set apart to reflect on God. Hyesun and I watched a little video when we were at Ocean Grove last month about two women who spent their summers at this Methodist camp village. They said that on Sunday they were not allowed to swim. They were not allowed to play games that involved dice. At first they said that it was really boring, but later they reflected on how they had to be creative for entertainment, and how they made up new games to play with one another. They were too young to be expected to meditate on the Bible or spend a long time in prayer, but by forcing them not to engage in so much recreation they built stronger bonds with each other. Older people would probably take walks or read their Bible or find a quiet place to spend with Jesus, building THAT relationship, and then reaping all the blessings that come out of that relationship.

How many of you know Psalm 23? You’d probably recognize it if you heard it. It starts, “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not…” what? “I shall not want!” We usually get so wrapped up in the beauty of the first part (“The Lord is my shepherd”) that we forget about the second part.

Yet it’s the first part that makes the second part possible: because the Lord is my shepherd, the One in whom I trust, the One who I follow…I shall not be enslaved to the cultural imperative to acquire and consume more and more and more. Because the Lord is my shepherd I don’t have this insatiable desire to play games and watch TV in all my spare time; I’m content to be with God. Because God has promised to take care of me, I will get off the treadmill of work and accumulation so that I can rest, and notice all that God has given me on this good earth, and rejoice!

Another verse in Psalm 23 says that the Lord “makes me lie down in green pastures.” That’s right; he MAKES YOU lie down. Some people can only rest if God makes them rest. I believe that observing a Sabbath is essential to your spiritual, yea your mental health.

So what’s the take home from this? What is it that I want you to do as a result of today’s message? Go lie down in green pastures…seriously! Maybe spread a blanket so bugs don’t crawl all over you, or if you can’t find a green pasture, try a beach, or your back yard, or a public park, somewhere where you can rest, and enjoy the bounty that God has provided for you, somewhere you can rejoice over God’s generosity. Make this a part of your weekly routine, so that, given enough time reflecting on God and being with God, you’ll honestly be able to say, “I shall not want…because the Lord is my shepherd.”

1. Quoted in David Lose’s article entitled *Rest*, posted July 15, 2012 at workingpreacher.org (http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear\_wp.aspx?article\_id=606) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)