

A couple of months ago I was in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a conference. Thanks to an ice storm, what was supposed to have been a 4-day trip turned into a 6-day one. When I first learned that my flight was cancelled I desperately tried every other ticket counter hoping to find a flight, any flight out of Grand Rapids. It was to no avail. The earliest flight out wasn't for at least another 24 hours. I was cranky, disappointed, and cold, and I sent my sister a message saying as much: “You won't believe this. My flight is cancelled and I'm going to be stuck here another night with nothing to do and nowhere to go. I knew I should have packed my laptop. At least I could have gotten some extra work done.” Without missing a beat she replied, “I'm sorry, Maria. Now you can read all those books though!” She was referring to the 15 books I had purchased at the conference even though I had half that many sitting unread on my nightstand. (I just can't pass up a new book.) So, as ice pelted the streets of Grand Rapids, I read. And read.

When I arrived at the airport the next day only to learn that my flight was cancelled again, I found another hotel and read some more. The hotel smelled of must and mildew, but it didn't inhibit the joy and pleasure of being able to do nothing but relax and read. I had forgotten how renewing reading was, how it transports us to other worlds and possibilities. Sitting at the airport the next day a woman who had been to the conference leaned over to me as we boarded the plane: “I guess it's back to reality now, huh?”

In other words, “playtime is over; back to work, back to the same-ole', same-ole'.” Back to the hustle-and-grind reality that makes rest an anomaly and productivity the norm. The assumption is that if you're not doing something you're not useful. If you're not useful, you're not relevant. If you're not relevant, then you're just taking up space. It's left us over-scheduled, over-promised, and over-functioning. It's so ingrained in us that we don't realize it until we're forced to. Researchers at Johns Hopkins and Columbia universities report that while retirement brings rest and joy for many, it's a source of depression and doubt.<sup>1</sup> Without work to fill their days, some people feel rudderless, useless, and irrelevant. In turn, they fill their days with endless activities to distract from the fear that they are not enough. In making utility, improvement, and speed as important as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we've become convinced that every second exists so

---

<sup>1</sup> David Levine, “Can Retirement Be a Depression Risk,” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 28, 2017, <https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/2017-07-28/can-retirement-be-a-depression-risk>, accessed June 1, 2018.

that we can be more, know more, and accomplish more. Whereas time was once a signpost of possibility and promise, it has become a limitation to defeat and an enemy to conquer.

We expect oil changes in 15 minutes, pictures in 30 minutes, and eye-glasses in an hour. We cut in traffic believing that catching that one light ahead of everyone will seal our fate. We fuss when we have to wait an extra 30 minutes in the doctor's office because they have wasted **our** time. And don't let someone get into the Express Lane at Safeway with 20 instead of 15 items or less. Strangers start mounting takeover plans. Have we always been this impatient? Have we always been this anxious and self-righteous? Do we realize the privilege inherit in our indignation with convenience?

### **It doesn't have to be this way.**

What if we traded in our reality for God's reality—one in which our success and productivity aren't the primary currency of being—for one based on the goodness of God? What if observed the sabbath as God intended? The call to rest, which we read about in the book of Deuteronomy, isn't a rule to keep the Israelites in check. It's a call to liberation. They had endured generations of enslavement under Pharaoh, and their whole existence was nothing more than an endless cycle of exhaustion, oppression, and toil. Sabbath was a way to recall that they were meant not for oppression but freedom—freedom from everything that kept them from experiencing the fullness of God's love and God's creation. Sabbath allowed them to see that they were more than their work and the expectations placed upon their lives.

Just as Sabbath was a way for the Israelites to remember how God delivered them from slavery, God invites us to rest and be free—free from the idea that doing, being, and having more will satisfy the longing—a longing that says we have arrived, we have made it. Somehow we've placed the commandment to rest with a human-made commandment to better. But nowhere does it say that God looked at creation upon its completion and decided to go for a second draft. Instead, God beheld and was satisfied with what was. As people made in God's image we can do nothing less. When we are so busy doing and achieving and improving and remodeling we don't have time to stop and appreciate the people and things that we have in our lives. We see what's wrong. We forget that we are human beings not human doings. We forget that the world will keep spinning even if we're not.

One of the things I often hear from people about why they can't stop and rest is that "people are counting on me." I wonder though: how much of that statement is based less on what others really need from of us and more about what we think and expect of ourselves and wanting to be "relevant?"

Friends, you don't have to say yes to every volunteer opportunity. No is not a bad word. Taking to time to rest without guilt is not an indulgence.

I will be the first to admit how hard this can be and how easy it is to fall into the trap. But not once has this world, my world, the church, and my family fallen apart because I didn't do something. The same is true for you. For those of you who are retired and enjoying rest, don't apologize for it in the least. Treat each day as an opportunity to behold the goodness and mercy of God, a day to love and discover more than you thought possible. Maybe you need not take a rest from doing something, but believing something—about yourself or others.

---

One of the ongoing conversations in our culture is whether whether we can have it all. Can we work and play in equal measure? Can we parent well and achieve the promotion we want? Here's the thing though: you have been baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. You have been marked as Christ's own. You have a purpose, an identity, and a future with God. So, maybe instead of asking can or should you have it all, maybe we ought to consider why you would even to when who you are is already enough.

Dr. Maria A. Kane  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Waldorf, MD  
June 3, 2018

\*\*\*In the audio version I invited people to write one thing that they won't do this week that keeps them from rest and one thing that they *will* do to engage in rest and delight. This idea comes from David Lose in "Rest" published on July 15, 2012 on the blog, *Working Preacher* (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1494>).\*\*\*