

Our Need, Right and Duty to Rest

On the bench in the front lawn of our church is a plaque with a quotation from Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." My wife and I gave this bench to the church and the community in memory of our daughter, who died four years ago this summer.

I enjoy seeing people using it, stopping and sitting. Sometimes we need to rest. As Jimmy Buffett sings in "Tryin to Reason With Hurricane Season":

And now I must confess
I could use some rest
I can't run at this pace very long

It seems strange to talk about resting after the enforced inactivity of COVID, but this kind of inactivity is not the same thing as rest. We are eager to get back to things, but we must remember our need, right, and duty to rest. Renewal is essential for us.

Rest and renewal are part of the created order. Our scriptures remind us that we have the right to rest because that act mirrors God's rest after creation. It goes so far as to say that everyone has this right. Everyone! In ancient Israel, enslaved people, servants, the stranger in our midst, the refugee and aliens, all of God's people, had the right to rest.

In addition, they had the duty to mirror God and rest on the Seventh Day. God knows we needed to be commanded to rest from our labors, for some of us would never take time out. God knows we must rest to enjoy our life and work. We need a pattern of work and rest that honors our need for both.

We need the renewal that energizes us to face the coming days with joy and energy. I just spent a week at Chautauqua, which I have enjoyed as a source of great renewal for the past twenty-something years. I call it summer camp for my body, mind, and spirit. I hope you have something like that that brings new life to your soul.

We also need this on a daily and a weekly basis. I know that, as a pastor, I should say we need to go to church on Sunday. But as my granddaughter said when she was younger, "We get to go to church." Worship is a gift to us, so we can take time to recognize that there is something sacred beyond us. We need to spend time with the One who is so much more than we can imagine. And spend time that is of a different

nature than our other activities. We need a time of life-giving gratitude. Worship provides just such a way to renew our hearts.

And daily we need to spend some time in rest and renewal. In our busy lives, we need to sit on a bench, rest, and give thanks for the beautiful gifts of God. We have a need, a right, and a duty to rest. And God calls to us through Jesus, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”