

Marion weekly update

SERMON March 3, "Keys to Kindness: Rest" Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 2:23-28

This week our key to kindness is rest. Most of us have probably figured this one out at this point. Rest is essential to being able to maintain a kind and compassionate heart even in the face of cruelty and callousness. Often we underestimate the toll of weariness on us. We overwork, overplay, and as a result overwhelm and overstress. Let's face it, sometimes it takes a lot of energy to be kind.

There's a reason the expression "tired and cranky" goes together. Rarely are we at our best when we are tired. We have expressions like "I don't have the energy for this" and "I don't have time for this." When life comes at us sideways tired and stressed isn't how we need to handle whatever is before us. Rest is where we rebuild whatever life has pecked away at.

Sleep is where our minds process through the information and events of the day. Rest is how muscles rebuild after they are worked and torn down. Without rest both our minds and bodies start to fall apart. As they do tempers get shorter and resolve to hold ourselves together gets weaker.

Restfulness on the other hand has the opposite effect. We are stronger in mind, body, and spirit. This allows us to handle people and circumstances more in keeping with what we know we should do. This strength helps us act in kindness when there may be temptation to be cruel.

I remember when I was much much younger I would push myself hard pretty nonstop. I learned something else about rest. If we don't take it, our bodies will force it. I could get away with burning the candle at both ends until finally I'd end up sick. Rest was forced upon me. When I got hired at the Board of Child Care before I was directing the spiritual life program I was staff on one of our semi independent units. Having learned this lesson it changed my view on holiday pay. We had the option as hourly employees on recognizes holidays to get an additional day's pay or to get a day off some time when we chose down the road. I promised myself I would always take that extra day off because my health was more important than the extra pay.

Sometimes life forces the grind on us. I did pretty well with restfulness until I went to seminary. I carried a full boat of classes, worked at the Board of Child Care and ran my karate school. Many days my commute time all totaled was 4-6 hours. At night I still had to do my school work. Reading, writing papers, and such. I remember Emma at the time wasn't the best sleeper so I'd bring her down into the living room with me and a pot of coffee while I did my thing. Eventually I'd put on this Straight No Chaser concert we'd accidentally recorded and she'd fall asle to Can't Take My Eyes Off of You every time. But without fail every time we had a break or a semester would end I'd quickly be wiped out and down and out for a while. Our bodies and minds ultimately will take the rest we don't give them.

God made provision for this from the outset in the 10 commandments. God tells us to take a day of rest. STOP working! Find quiet. Find refreshment. Find restoration. Take a walk. Take a nap. Get away from the busyness that the world tries to tell us is a badge of honor. Yes, we need to work and work well. But we also need to remember that's not all there is in the world.

Even God essentially says "look, I'm God and even I needed to take a day. What about you?"

This idea of Sabbath has been lost. Whatever day someone calls Sabbath, be it Saturday or Sunday, for so many has become just one more day to fill and pile more stuff into. We make all kinds of excuses for it. Sometimes we call it necessity. Sometimes we call it holy. We're going to see in a moment why these excuses can be damaging to our faith.

One of the great tragedies of our society today is that there are many who would LOVE to take a Sabbath and genuinely can't. They can't make ends meet with one job so they work two or three, and that takes every day of the week. Then those who have the luxury of a Sabbath don't take advantage of the opportunity.

In the days of Christ the idea was twisted as well. But it was twisted the other direction. Work was so defined that even the most minor task was deemed sinful if done. Jesus puts the correction to it. He and His disciples are pulled up for picking a few heads of grain. On another occasion He is pulled up for healing a man. When He healed the man His counter was brilliant. "If one of your donkeys falls

into a ditch on the Sabbath don't you pull it out?" Of course they do.

This kind of Sabbath isn't rest because the stress of following the rules is work in and of itself.

This was an example of something that persists today. Rules are there for other people. When it becomes inconvenient for the one making the rule or enforcing it they give themselves permission to break it. They are the exception, but no one else is.

Humans have an all or nothing problem. It's either do nothing or do anything.

Jesus also reminds them of why the Sabbath was instituted. It wasn't for humans to serve the Sabbath but for the Sabbath to serve the human. It serves us by giving us the rest we so dearly need

There is one more facet to Sabbath that we can't leave out, and it's why filling it with all kinds of other busyness is spiritually detrimental.

The Sabbath is there for us to connect with God. In the rest, the quiet, the reflection, for us the worship, we take this day to begin the week genuinely connecting with our Creator. Filling the day with busyness is filling the day with distraction. For some this is necessary because sitting in quiet reflection is terrifying. What might they find? What might God say or reveal? If I don't like it that means I then have to bear the weight of guilt for refusing it or do the work of making change.

Even in worship there is distraction. I've through the years seen too many people engaged more with their technology than with the worship at hand. How do we hear God with all of this noise in our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds?

We often regard God's voice as that "still small voice." If we truly want to hear it we have to still ourselves, quiet ourselves, and this means quieting and bringing stillness to our lives. Rest.

The payoff is substantial. Our bodies and minds get the health they need which means we are better able to tackle what comes at us through the week. Our spirits are healthier and more connected to God. This gives us clarity, hope, purpose, and direction. When we hear God's voice we get to bask in the warmth of the places where God is telling us we're doing well. We get to appreciate the accountability of a Father who cares enough to redirect us and couches it in the promise and assurance of grace and forgiveness.

So take a day. One of the great modern understandings is that what we need is a DAY of rest. It doesn't have to be the same as everyone else. Believe it or not Sundays are not a day of rest for me. Some of you may have noticed that Fridays I am largely, intentionally unavailable. That's my Sabbath. I've learned over the last few years to guard it very seriously. If your schedule shifts, your Sabbath may shift from week to week. Whatever the case take a day. A day to rest, to reflect, to seek quiet, to separate from the busyness of the world. Ignore your email. Ignore insignificant text messages. Ignore calls where you don't recognize the number. Unplug.

Just like most of our technology the first step to improving its health and correcting problems is to unplug, wait, then plug back in. For us that unplugging is the day God has already proclaimed for us to rest. That day is Sabbath.

BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel 10

Chapter 10 answers the cliffhanger of chapter 9. Saul is finally anointed king. Imagine Saul at this point. Remember in chapter 9 he didn't seem all that ambitious or prepared. Our speculation was that this man seeking his dad's donkeys finds himself in unexpected and honored circumstances that he wasn't seeking to begin with. His head must have been swimming and now here Samuel is doing the official act of anointing him into this role that Israel had never before had in leadership. There must have been incredible disbelief even at this moment. Fortunately Samuel has an answer for this.

Samuel gives Saul a prediction of what he will experience as he travels onward. There is no way Samuel could know these things unless God has spoken them to him. Were none of them or only one or two to occur perhaps Saul could chalk it up to coincidence and if he were inclined run away from this duty. When all three are fulfilled there can be no doubt that this is God's doing. All three are fulfilled. It would seem given Saul's behavior later in the chapter that he was not chomping at the bit for this role.

Saul's reticence is overcome by Samuel's taking charge. Yes, there is a new king, but no one other than Samuel and now Saul know. Samuel strangely tells Saul that after all three signs are complete to do whatever he wants to do. Then Samuel tells Saul what to do. Why? First it exerts that Samuel continues to be the one through whom God speaks. He is still the prophet and that hasn't changed. Also perhaps this was a mercy on Saul. How does an uncertain man know what to do with this powerful role that no one knows about? So Samuel tells him where to go and what to do.

We are told that God changes Saul's heart. It's uncertain what this means completely. Perhaps it was simply that Saul allowed the reality that this was going to happen, like it or not, to set in. It's doubtful it was made more courageous as later we find him hiding in the "supplies". Perhaps it was some moral sense? Perhaps. Whatever it is, something shifts in Saul's heart moving him closer to his kingship. The ecstatic experience with the prophets is significant. Saul does what he's never done before, he prophesies. Not just prophecy, but frenzied prophecy in the midst of other prophets. The ones who knew him were confused. This wasn't the Saul they knew. Saul was possessed by the Spirit of God. Did he even fully comprehend what had happened on the other side of the experience? Again, it must have been bewildering.

People asked if Saul was now a prophet. They would find that he was not. This experience signified something else. Having the Spirit of God come upon him was a sign of his selection as king. Word of this spread as there was a "saying" that became associated with it. Later, as Saul is selected as king before Israel, that the Spirit of God rested on Saul in this dramatic way would be confirmation for the people that there was something different about this man. It is a sign that God has empowered this man for this role to lead the nation.

Imagine the folks who knew him. Their reaction. Have you ever known someone for a long time and thought you had a bead on them only to be shocked? Sometimes we surprise other people and others surprise us. It may be one has a new passion, a new calling, a new excellence in something, a stunning knowledge or skill, or anything that seems out of ordinary to us. In this case it was out of the ordinary for Saul as well, but for those who have done the work what is new to us isn't to them. They have done the journey and owned whatever it is that's impressing. When it's real we do well to own it in ourselves and accept it in others.

There's an interesting exchange with Saul's uncle. It's simple but telling. Saul lets him know that when they couldn't find the donkeys they went to Samuel, which is a gross summary of the actual incident. They didn't seek Samuel specifically but a "seer". It happened that seer was Samuel. Naturally curious that his nephew had had an audience with this great prophet he was curious about what Samuel had said. He only gets the minor half of the story. "He told us that the donkeys were found". The MUCH bigger part was left out. There's no reason given as to why.

These moments where there's no reason give us great opportunity to ask questions of ourselves. We can't say for certain why the character in the story made their choice, but we may be able to glean some sympathy for their decision. One would think being anointed king would be something to share joyfully, at least with family. Yet it doesn't always happen that way.

Sometimes we're afraid of disbelief. We know they can't fathom our news and don't want to deal with the lack of faith in us. Perhaps there is fear of being mocked in the face of that disbelief. There may be fear of criticism. Even though this kind of news confers honor on the family what if they don't want that attention? What about the confusion that could come wondering what responsibilities the family may incur as a result. Perhaps Saul still wasn't fully convinced this wasn't some strange dream and he'd wake up realizing he still needed to find those donkeys. There are many many reasons that Saul may have kept it secret. Our own experiences can help us find sympathy rather than criticism for choices that may on the surface be head scratchers otherwise.

Samuel then calls for an assembly at Mizpah. If you think prophets of old were without snark, sarcasm, irony, or a sense of humor this puts that to rest. Mizpah was the site where, when the ark was returned to Israel, God sent the Philistines into a panic allowing Israel to win the day in battle. It was that moment where rather than taking things into their own hands when they heard that the Philistines

were gathered to attack they asked Samuel to plead with God to intervene. Their plea was heard and God intervened. God won the day and it seemed that Israel was getting back on track putting God in the role of both God and King over them.

As if to remind them of their failing this is where Samuel chooses to select Saul as king. The initial words he speaks are words of judgement. He notes that God was the God that delivered them from Egypt, all of their enemies and disasters and calamities. He's pointing out that they are forsaking the King who literally delivered them on that spot not long ago for a human king.

Then they cast lots to determine which tribe, then which clan, family, and so forth to the man who would be king. Why would Samuel do this? He already knew. He could have just said "here's Saul, your new king!" He didn't.

One reason is that doing it this way still reminds the people that God is God. They aren't doing the selecting. It's not put to a vote. It's not done through politics within tribal leadership. Casting lots divined God's will, not man's. Remember that it was the gathered elders who demanded a king. Likely these were men of influence, means, and power within Israel. If they had an inkling that they would manipulate the selection of the king to their advantage the wind was taken out of those sails. Despite Israel rejecting God in favor of a human king, God hasn't left them to their own devices completely. This faithfulness of God is incredibly encouraging. In a world where people get written off and canceled at the drop of a hat, faithfulness and loyalty is fading. Over and over again in the Old Testament we see God standing by Israel despite themselves and their failings. If God stood by them God stands by us in our messes and sin, now as then, always hoping we'll come to our senses and put our nonsense aside. The arms of God are always open for our return when we stray.

Another reason is that if things go awry with this king they can't hang it on Samuel. They can't accuse Samuel of just choosing someone on his own and forcing him on Israel. Samuel may be the vehicle through whom God speaks but the lots confirm that the outcome is on God, not Samuel.

This leads us to a final reason. The people as a whole can see that this is God's man. Taking the time to go tribe by tribe and so forth shows a respect and regard for this pivotal moment in Israel's history. It's not express trained, it's not glossed over, it's not impatiently forced. Time is taken to inquire of God. They have asked God for a king. God is answering. It's not an election that can be questioned but a divinely appointed position and person.

When the selection is formalized (Samuel already knew the outcome), his tone changes a bit. As the people cheer Samuel seems to give them that moment of celebration in his own tone.

In that moment when Saul is selected, however, Saul can't be found. He's hiding. Once again we see that Saul at his initiation doesn't seem all too confident. Again, let's give him grace. Israel has never had a king. Saul has no idea what he's doing. There is no capital, no palace, no standing unified army, no governing structure for a united Israel, nothing like that. He's creating from scratch. Honestly, were someone to enter this with confidence and arrogance it would be disturbing. That person, in my opinion, wouldn't have respect for the daunting task ahead. Humility and a dose of trepidation and fear are a sign of healthy regard.

Samuel records the expectations for the king and places them before the Lord likely in some nearby sanctuary. This is yet another sign that God is still God. The king is responsible to carry out those duties faithfully. While the king may have no earthly accountability, laying that document before God is a reminder that there is still accountability before God. Even the most powerful in the world is still under the eye and accountability of God.

Saul is sent home. This may seem like humble beginnings for a king. There's no other option!

There's no throne, palace, or even capital. Where else would he go? He doesn't go alone. A troop of "valiant men" accompany him. These aren't necessarily bodyguards. Saul has a job if we recall. The purpose of this king is to save Israel from her enemies. A band of warriors is the beginning of forming the force that would accomplish this. It's likely the humble beginnings of an army to protect Israel.

Not everyone is happy. Some "scoundrels" ask if Saul can deliver on this purpose. Maybe this was sour grapes that someone else wasn't chosen. Perhaps they saw his hiding as cowardice and wondered

how on earth someone like that could forge a military that could be effective. Whatever the case this incidental question may have been unintentionally foreshadowing. Whatever Saul is at the beginning, we know how his story ends.

Whatever the case, Israel has now been officially united under a king. Their journey together under the kingship of man rather than God begins.