

**7 Kinds of Rest**  
UU Church of Vancouver  
April 16, 2023

**Reflection on the Theme by Ronnie Mars**

Do you ever get the urge to pinch yourself about certain aspects of your life? That's how I feel about my existence. My life is peppered with moments of unforgettable events.

Years ago, I used to operate the camera at Antioch Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, the largest black church there. During the summer, I was operating the camera for their seven-thirty and their eleven o'clock morning services. And I'm talking about a second service that would let out around one-thirty.

One Sunday morning I rose, ran three miles, showered and got dressed for church (that included jacket, shirt and tie). That's how we dressed for church there. I was walking to the front door to leave. To the left of my door was my sofa. My mind was aiming for the door, but my body veered toward the sofa and that's where I landed. I slept for two hours. The previous week, we had a weeklong revival, and I operated the camera every evening for those services. And I was working my day job at the Multimedia Installation at the Army Medical Center and School.

I made these commitments at that church, and I wasn't even religious. I attended for the fellowship and for a sense of belonging.

I gave up the earlier service. I had no salvation or higher aspirations for an angelic afterlife I was aiming for. I do not believe in that. It's the here and now that guides me.

When my cousin, Hubert Wilkins, died twelve years ago, a friend and I lamented after his funeral about all the African American men dying in their late fifties and early sixties. My cousin was a year older than me. I couldn't tell you what he died from. I hadn't seen or talked with him in years. Life happened!

The stones we drop here in our bowl reminds me of the marbles he and I would trade or shoot together as kids. Spiritual rest simply reminds me to slow down and appreciate my family and friends that show up in my life.

Before I retired, I began to take a day off when I needed a respite from the daily grind. Three coworkers who retired before I did, all retired for medical reasons. That got my attention. I was fifty-nine years old and had reached the age of eligibility for retirement. I considered working two or more years but after my cousin's death, I submitted my retirement papers three months later. I was going to be healthy when I stopped working. I was passionate about my work and overtime, I got to do something I loved *and* got paid for doing it. But I was ready for a change. Since my retirement, it seems I'm busier now than before. The difference is I get to choose what I do every day. That is the salvation of having a great career and enjoying the fruits of that labor. Today is the first day of the rest of your life!

### **Sermon: 7 Kinds of Rest by Mellie Hock**

Is anyone here tired? When I was in high school French, my teacher used to take roll by asking us - Ca va? How are you? And about 75% of the teenagers in that class would answer at 7:30 in the morning- Fatigue. Tired.

Is anyone burned out here? That's slightly less common, but much more insidious. Burn out, if you are lucky enough to not be in a profession that is prone to it and haven't heard the term, is characterized by the World Health Organization as 'feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job or negative feelings about one's job, and reduced professional efficacy stemming from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.' They stress that it is an occupational phenomenon, not a medical diagnosis.

We have seen an uptick in burnout. Maybe it is because we have a better definition, maybe it is because we have less stigma around mental health struggles and more people are recognizing their burnout instead of hiding it. Maybe it is because work stress is higher or changes in family systems are not supporting traditional working environments, amplifying the effects of an already strained system. Maybe it's COVID. The agnostic definition of salvation is - preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss. It is hard not to see how rest could be our salvation from fatigue and, ultimately, from burn out.

I recently started a new job teaching at a community college that, now that I mention it, does not have a Nap Ministry but I'm sure the students wouldn't mind one. This quarter I created a new project for the students - they have to write a treatment note as if they have just treated a patient. They submit one note every day and I promise to give feedback by noon so they can write their next note. The catch is that three days a week I start teaching at 8 am. You've spotted the problem here.

I wake up early to grade the notes. I make coffee and sit on my couch in my sweats and with my hair looking like that bird from the Pixar short 'Piper' after he gets wrecked by the wave. Almost every day, in my 8 am class, I get asked what time I get up. I get asked when I go to bed. I get asked if I'm tired. \*Yes\* I am tired. I sleep in on the weekends, I go to bed earlier than I ever did during my brief mid-thirties retirement last summer. And I'm still much more tired. But, I do not think it is sleep that will help me.

When I was in grad school I learned how to make this salsa / chopped salad thing from my aunt. It is an onion, tomato, jalapeno, as many bell peppers as you want, cilantro, all chopped up with beans and olive oil and lime juice. It takes forever to make- probably at least 90 minutes of chopping various vegetables. I made this salad every other week for two years. I was going to class, going to clinic, trying to cram more information than I felt was reasonable for a human to know into my head. My brain was tired and needed the mental break of endless chopping.

Compare that to the total body fatigue I feel when I climb out of the swimming pool or lie in corpse pose at the end of a yoga session. Maybe for you it is a different activity - a hike or skiing or lifting at the gym. My muscles are tired, my body feels like it has used its energy and it needs rest.

The need for these two kinds of rest - mental and physical- are what most people think they need when they're tired. They used energy doing activities they do every day - to think and to move so they must need a break from those activities. But there are other types of fatigue that can be combated with other kinds of rest.

During the height of the COVID lockdown I found myself extra irritable. I had sent my cat to live with my parents for six weeks because I could not stand another living being physically on top of me. I was going to work on empty roads, looking at my patients' and coworkers' eyes through goggles and wondering every night when I went home if I had just accidentally killed anyone by bringing asymptomatic COVID into the skilled nursing facility where I worked.

I just didn't feel like everything was stressful - it was stressful, it wasn't in my head. And I was cranky about it. But it was also simply exhausting. My emotional fatigue was off the charts - and I know I wasn't alone. We're still working that fatigue back, processing the loss of life, structure, and relationships. We are taking a years long emotional rest to heal the trauma we experienced together. So, when I'm frustrated by a process or can feel my anxiety rising, I try to become more mindful of my state.

I know we have encountered the idea of mindfulness, but I want to try a quick exercise. If you're comfortable, and without moving from your seat, take a look around you. Find three things that are red. Okay, now find three things that are blue. Alright, one more - find three things that look soft. Consider for a moment one small movement that could make you feel 1% better - rolling your wrists or taking a deep breath or shifting your weight. You just became more mindful by connecting with your present and you took action to help yourself feel better

in this moment. We can use exercises like this to help to regulate our emotional fatigue and reengage.

During the height of COVID I poured more energy into this community, into my spiritual life. Spirituality shows up for me in my connections to humanity. Just like emotional fatigue and mental fatigue and physical fatigue, spiritual fatigue is going to be prompted by different sources for different people. A lot of us find spirituality in a connection to the great mystery or maybe to God. Some of us emphasize a spiritual connection to ourselves or to nature. Spiritual fatigue can happen when we lean out of that relationship, when we prioritize our energy differently. It shows up as disappointment or unease with ourselves and is sometimes hard to pinpoint. But it can be reinvigorated by leaning back in - by making intentional connections with yourself or with God or with your community.

Now, I will also say that I am an extrovert. Just in case you haven't noticed that about me. I gain energy from connecting with other people. But, you know. Not every other person. Social fatigue can come from spending time with people who take energy instead of giving it. We don't always have a choice in who we're spending time with, but we can also seek out those energy sources in our lives. I have a group of about five friends - you could call us a knitting group, but some of us are pretty vocal about the fact that we do not, in fact, all knit. We gather in various combinations several times a week and I'm getting calls and texts from them almost daily. After a long day of meetings and screens, it is not that I am all peopled out. I just need the right people. Experiencing the social rest of being with 'your people' can fill that need.

In the 1980s, articles started cropping up about 'a physiological and psychological exercise called Forest Bathing' in Japan. The goal was not necessarily to exercise - not to run or hike or even walk for the sake of walking. The goal was to immerse the senses in the green space. To hear the birds and smell the petrichor and see the green, to feel the wind and let the forest in. The benefits, practitioners said, were endless.

When I went to Opal Creek Ancient Forest a few years ago with the youth group, we did a similar exercise. They called it a 'forest shower.' For about half a mile on the path our guides had left cards with instructions. Look up - and there would be the forest canopy. Close your eyes - and you could hear the trickle of water and the movement of tree limbs in the wind. Find as many triangles as you can - and we could pull triangles out of rocks and tree limbs framing the sky and even in fallen logs. We reconnected with our senses.

Currently, the internet tethered people of our world have a different way of phrasing this - when a video or post online gets a little out there, the comments will pop off with one command - Go touch grass. Get out. Get out of the house, out of the internet, and touch some grass. Reconnect with your sensations, re-regulate your sensory systems. When we get touched out or disconnect with our physical space we need sensory rest. We need to touch grass.

Physical rest, mental rest, emotional rest, spiritual rest, social rest, sensory rest. I promised seven, right? The last one, maybe the most fun one - creative rest. This one actually scares me a little. I'm not a creative person. I don't paint or draw; I do fiber crafts but only with a pattern. I enjoy writing, but only nonfiction and only for an audience. But creative rest doesn't require a product at the end. Creative rest allows the space for you to reinvent. It is a sabbatical. We can all emulate Rev. Kathryn, ministers and professors everywhere, who take sabbaticals. This intentional rest, which may or may not result in a painting or two, allows creative reimagining of your daily life. I know when I return from a vacation or long weekend, I have more treatment ideas for my physical therapy practice, I have more ideas for fun activities. I return to my life with my creativity renewed.

Returning to your life renewed is the whole goal of rest. Rest is not there to pull you out of your normal cycles. While it can be large and intentional - I recently took a four day trip that was very restful - it can also be daily. The key is finding which kind of rest suits your needs. If you're waking up still tired, still disconnected, still on the road to burnout, maybe it is not sleep you need. Maybe it is a visit with your people, maybe it is some white space to let your

creativity flow. Maybe it is a 30 second mindfulness practice or an opportunity to move your body instead of your brain. Rest is part of the rhythm.

I encourage us all to take stock of our fatigue. Engage in our rest. And come back renewed and reinvigorated.