

My soul is at rest...

Sabbath rest

The other morning I got up early, went for a run and then spent a really stimulating couple of hours preparing these stations. In work (whatever that might be for you) we find purpose, challenge, meaning, stimulus and an outlet for our creativity. Work is good...or it can be.

Genesis 2:2-3 reads

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Why do we overwork? Do we not trust God to provide for us, so we have to do it for ourselves? Or, do we need *more* meaning and purpose because we don't seek it in God? Moses had to remind the people of Israel again in Exodus 20:8-10

'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Jesus had several arguments over the Sabbath with the Pharisees, and once famously retorted (Mark 2:27)

Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

This wasn't to devalue the Sabbath, but to remind them that the Sabbath has a purpose to blessing us - giving us rest.

How do you take Sabbath?

What do you seek in work that diminishes your Sabbath? Meaning, purpose, reward or something else?

How do make sure that the Sabbath you do take is rest that is blessed and holy?

What do you need to get rid of in order for Sabbath to be rest for you?

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Rest from weariness

Jesus promised a respite from the weariness of the World

In Matthew 11:28-30 he says

‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

In a Church like St Chad’s there are a lot of people working really hard, sometimes under quite stressful conditions. It is all too easy to forget that Jesus promises an easy yolk and a light burden.

Is that how we feel about our walk with Jesus?

How do we find that lightness of following Jesus closely, our Master and Friend, and knowing once more that lightness?

Spend some time being honest with yourself before Him. What are the things which cause you stress in your walk with Him?

What can we leave with Him?

What can we leave behind?

What might need to change in you to find that light yolk again?

Sit, if you would like to, close your eyes and hold your open hands before the Cross, offering the things which make your burden heavy.

Lord Jesus, I want to walk with you afresh. Take away the burdens I have placed on myself, or allowed others to place on me. Restore my soul once more. Amen.

My soul is at rest...

Rest as restoration

Isaiah was writing at a time of exile and oppression. And yet, even with all the odds stacked against God's people, Isaiah knew restoration would come and the mighty tyrants would fall. In Isaiah 14:3-4 he taunts these powers

On the day the Lord gives you relief from your suffering and turmoil and from the harsh labour forced on you, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:

How the oppressor has come to an end!
How his fury has ended!

Sometimes we really need a rest! Things have got so on top of us that it almost feels like oppression.

So how do we respond to those situations? Do we pull up the drawbridge, lock the door, close the curtains and hide?

Or do we seek that deep restoration that comes only from God?

These things that oppress us (whether they are from outside, or inside or they are "our demons") do not ultimately hold us - only God's loving hands can do that.

Spend time seeking that restful restoration - the reconnection of you at the deepest level with your loving Heavenly Father.

David touched on this in Psalm 139

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Rest in Him for a while, and be restored.

My soul is at rest...

Rest from labours

My experience of not resting sufficiently from my labours is that I start to feel resentful and this removes any degree of gratitude I might have.

Jesus' ministry was starting to take off. Mark 6:30-31 records

The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

Even as things seem to be going well, it is important to rest - to find the space to be restored and made new. Even Jesus had to do this.

When we are busy we rush, we cut corners, we see ourselves as the important piece in the jigsaw. When we rest we recognise our spent-ness and our need not to achieve, but just to be. Hopefully, we recognise God's hand at work - we usually need time spent in rest to spot it.

What are my labours?

How do I rest from them?

Be still for a while and in your imagination step back from your daily routine. Are there areas within which you feel a degree of resentment?

Father God, I lay before you the work and challenges of my life and my walk with you. I repent of the areas I have thought of where I bear a resentment. Please allow me to find a rest so that I can let you change my resentment to gratitude. Amen

Don't forget! Straight after Jesus had rested he fed 5000 people (Mark 6:32-44). Sometimes we need to rest when we think we need to keep going, because God wants us fresh for a new challenge just around the corner.

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Rest as safety

Read Psalm 4 slowly and carefully

Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

How long will you people turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself;
the Lord hears when I call to him.

Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.

Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
and trust in the Lord.

Many, Lord, are asking, 'Who will bring us prosperity?'
Let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy
when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, Lord,
make me dwell in safety.

Sleep seems, for many of us, an elusive mystery especially when are struggling with something. David, with all the responsibilities of being King and the problems within his own family, finds this safety in sleep by turning only to God.

Think about the things which make you feel unsafe, and those which rob you of a good night's sleep.

Ask God for his peace in those areas. Wait for a while and receive from Him.

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Rest as trusting in God

Moses is leading the people of Israel across Sinai to the Promised Land. This is a journey from slavery to freedom, from oppression to promise, from being treated as animals by the Egyptians to being invited into the presence of God. Moses has borne the burden of leadership and so he questions God about the future. (Exodus 33:14)

The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'

The lit candle is a traditional representation of the presence of Jesus.

Sit or kneel before the candle and invite God to be present.

After some time in stillness, ponder those things which cause you anxiety - where do you need to learn to trust in the presence of God (or maybe re-learn!)

There's a well known song we do sometimes.

TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete.

*This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.*

To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away;
To cherish each moment,
Here I would stay.

Dwell here for a time in the presence of God. This isn't work or effort. This is resting in His presence.

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Rest as peace

John records a long speech by Jesus as he prepares his disciples for Good Friday. In John 16 he speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit, or their grief at seeing Jesus suffer and how they will be victorious over the world. He concludes (John 16:33)

‘I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’

We have already sung

BE STILL, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

It is only natural to want to know what lies ahead. Uncertainty causes us stress and anxiety. Paul knew this when he wrote in Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We stand on holy ground. This is a place of safety. We can be at peace knowing we are held by the all-powerful loving Creator God.

Enjoy this place.

Loving Father. Give me your peace, I pray, to guard my heart and my mind. Amen

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Rest and our eternal destination

After the death of a believer it is customary to pray that they may 'rest in peace and rise in glory!'

As we await the moment of Judgement when God works to bring together all the loose strands of history and make all things new we recognise that we may rest in peace before then, but there is an eternity beyond that moment.

John was writing his Revelation in order to encourage those believers who were being persecuted and even martyred to hold on and stay true to their faith. He does this by recording that moment of rising in glory and what we will see (Revelation 21:1-7)

Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'

He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'

This vision should inspire us too - to faithfulness and *being* not just doing.

Ultimately, God is interested in our character and not our achievements.

How are you going to rest in the coming days so that you may appreciate God's good purposes for you in the coming weeks as well as for eternity?