

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting
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Abundant Work and Rest
2 Samuel 7:1-6, 8-13, Mark 6:30-44

2 Samuel 7: 1-6, 8-13

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.” But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Message

Both of our stories today are about doing things and not doing things; work, not work, and even rest. The first story about King David follows a litany of things

he did to establish his kingdom. After he rested, he finally realized he had done nothing for God who had been in his corner all along. He had a house but God still “resided” in a tent. We might imagine the retired shepherd looked a little sheepish at this point. (You can groan at the bad joke). There are many reasons God might want to remain in a tent, one being this is God who moves- across the water at Creation- and with the people. But I want to focus on the fact God had work to be done, but not all of it was David’s to do. David and Nathan tried to make plans but building God’s house was not their work.

I see applications for my life and perhaps you will for yours. Here are some practical queries I wrestle with: Do I know I am not indispensable? Do I keep good boundaries for myself and others; do I bite off more than I can chew or take on more responsibility than is mine to handle? Am I tempted to get ahead of everyone else and the Spirit, or hold on to things I should share? Do I participate fully in community, teach and mentor others to carry on when I cannot? Am I preparing a way and gathering a “legacy” for others to build on and carry the work forward? Do I invite others in so they can bring their ideas? Am I too busy planning and coming up with new ideas to focus on what needs done now?

Going even deeper: What is the “work” God has for me to do here and now? Is it more important to accomplish something or just be present to people and God in the moment? What has God done, what have I already been able to do with

Spirit's leading that I have not acknowledged or celebrated? Am I working/living in joyful, appreciative, abundance or desperate, anxious scarcity?

I know someone who is struggling with their sense of worth. They have accomplished amazing things: education with top grades, involved in church and service to the community, and a fulfilling job. The American success story in progress- rushing headlong with no break -into life. Full stop; they are depressed, anxious, feeling alone, driven to be perfect and give 150%. And do it cheerfully.

I have plenty of advice to give this delightful, capable and loving person, because I was there. I am often there. So I ask- what gives you joy? What does God have for you to do right now? Is it more important to accomplish or be present in the moment? God wants you to live and work in joyful, appreciative, abundance.

I saw a chart- "We are not Machines" that reminded me my Dad told me not to compare myself with others, or with myself, "Just do your best." Along the vertical axis of the chart was accomplishment. Along the horizontal axis was days of the week. Each data point was labeled 100%, but the points and connecting line went up and down. In other words, if we give our best every day some days our 100% mark shows achievement, other days it doesn't. We are not machines- whatever our 100% is each day is appropriate, amazing, enough.

We also have many "charts" in our lives which represent all the projects and relationships we juggle each day. We wear ourselves out, doing the impossible to

accomplish something every day on every chart. We cannot give 100% each day to each thing. We may only be able to give a small portion of ourselves. It may not always feel that way, but it is the best we can do at the time, and it is enough.

What I see from the story about David and Nathan is the call to faithfully respond and not be anxious. Just do your part. If you don't know what that is ask God and a friend. During a particularly difficult and anxious period of my life I had a friend who would sit down with me and my impossibly long and challenging list of things to do. With prayer and patience she helped me sort out the priority and then held on to the list so I focused on one thing at a time! I am sure David felt sad he could not build God's house. But he had plenty of other priority work to do, including preparing a legacy with which his son could build.

In the story about Jesus and his disciples there is one line about rest and the rest is all work. Jesus and his disciples were on the move! Jesus trusted them to do something new. As fishermen outside their comfort zone they were preaching, teaching, healing and exorcising demons. They did not have time to get their "pitch" perfect. They got the basics, were sent out, returned to talk about what happened, tweaked it and went out again. I imagine Jesus said, "Go. Do your best to love and be God's love."

Then came the hungry crowds. The disciples panicked. They only knew two ways to obtain food- go fishing or go buy it. Jesus saw another way and provided

enough to feed everyone with plenty of left overs for doggie bags. This was because he believed in and empowered the people. When he reminded them of God's abundance by blessing the few loaves and fish, everyone brought out their lunches and shared without reservation, emptying their pockets and lunch boxes with love. I see this in our meeting every day. Friends of all ages and gifts want to be involved, give and share of themselves, however and wherever they can.

People in the community want this as well. They have ideas of what is needed and how they can participate. Later today we will hear about one community project where this is working. We know of churches that offer ministry and service to those who are hungry and living on the streets. Another church is opening a center for spirituality and the arts as an “on-ramp” for the “spiritual but not religious.” It is an invitation to develop a meaningful spiritual life in community. They offer programs, classes, discussion groups, and concerts on spiritual topics and practices based in love. They will build community with table fellowship, art, dance, theater, painting, cooking and meditation .¹

We know God provides the work and the resources and we are called to co-create by taking action. None of us is responsible for all the work, just our part, and God is with us through it allforever. Spirit is generating amazing energy for us to

¹ Bethany Center for Spirituality and the Arts

invite participation and community in our lives and in our meeting. Do you seen and feel it? Let us celebrate the abundant work with joyful appreciation!

Whenever rest is mentioned in the stories about Jesus it is one small line. After all, rest does not take a lot of narrative explanation. But I don't think that is because it was unimportant. On the contrary I think it was included in the story because it is so very important. The story about David tells us that it wasn't until he rested that he realized he overlooked God. Amidst all the amazing work you are doing, please take time to rest. Ask others for help, step out of the room or the project briefly when you need to take a break, take a siesta or get a meal or kumquat jam delivered from Friends. We have your back. Remember to go away to rest and pray like Jesus did with his disciples, so when you come back you will be ready to, "Go. Do your best to love and be God's love."