

Matthew 11:25-30

R & R©
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This past Friday we celebrated our Independence as a country with lots of noise. In fact, someone who lives close to us has been celebrating for over a week now. Call me old and cranky but I find it exhausting to have the sound of bombs going off for hours seven nights in a row.

But, I know it's all in the name of freedom so who can complain about that? I guess it's really not all that bad and I do enjoy beautiful fireworks.

Of course, many people have spent the entire weekend seeking the two R's ... Rest and Relaxation. I was on I-75 Thursday with lots of traffic. We were heading north. I was heading north just to Holly but I'm sure many of them were heading to the real "up north."

The traffic flowed and then it stopped and then it flowed and then it stopped. Engines roared, horns honked, and at one point I looked in my rear view mirror to see the face of a man who was looking like he might bust a seam. I think he was frustrated that the traffic had slowed to a crawl.

I thought it was a bit ironic how people put themselves through crazy chaos to try to find a little R&R for the holiday. (Not that I haven't done it myself.)

I found a story from the Upper Room that speaks of this very thing:

There is a story that Hebrew families tell their children to help them understand the fourth commandment: to remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy.

"The Sweetest Sound" is the story of King Ruben, and it goes something like this:

King Ruben was always asking questions. "Where is the hottest place on earth?" "Where is the place that the snow falls deepest?" One day he asked his advisors, "What is the sweetest melody of all?"

His wise men rubbed their chins and searched their books of wisdom, but they could not find the answer.

"Why not have a contest to find the sweetest melody?" they suggested. So the king called all the musicians of his kingdom to come to the palace.

Early in the morning, they gathered under the king's window with flutes, harps, violins, horns, bells, drums, banjos, bugles, chimes, cymbals, gongs, triangles, lutes, lyres and trumpets.

Their tuning and scraping and testing awoke the king. Smiling, King Ruben jumped up, believing that today he would discover the sweetest melody in all the world.

Throughout the morning, the king sat on his balcony and listened. By noon, he had listened to all the sounds imaginable that could be made by plucking, tinkling, blowing and banging.

By afternoon, the king had heard all the melodies, which could be made by whistling, jingling, shaking, sawing, buzzing and pounding. Then the advisors asked their king, "To your ears, which melody is the sweetest?"

King Ruben had listened, but he could not tell which sound was the sweetest.

One of his advisors suggested that he should have all the instruments play together, at the same time. "A wonderful idea," said the king.

All of the instruments rang, bonged, blared, pealed, strummed and whistled together. King Ruben wrinkled his face and listened with all his might. The noise was so great he could not think.

Just at that moment, a woman dressed in her Sabbath best pushed to the front of the crowd. It was now late on Friday afternoon. "O King, I have the answer to your question," she said. The king was surprised because she did not even have an instrument.

"Why didn't you come earlier?" the king asked.

The woman replied, "I had to wait until just before the setting of the sun."

Sure enough, the sun was setting in the west. The musicians were still puffing, blowing, chiming and strumming. But again, there was so much noise the king could hardly think. He raised his hand.

"Stop!" he said. And all the musicians put down their instruments.

Taking two candles and placing them on the balcony railing, the woman lit them. Just as the sun was setting, the flames of the candles glowed.

She lifted her voice and prayed, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who sanctified us by thy commandments and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights."

Then she took her hands away from her face. “He that has ears to hear, let him hear,” she said.

The king raised his head; the advisors took their hands away from their ears. The people in the crowd stood still.

The king was whispering, “What? What is that?” He could not hear a sound.

“What you hear is the sound of rest. And isn’t the peace that the Sabbath brings the sweetest melody of all?”¹

Jesus talks about “this generation” ... meaning, of course, his generation. Yet, we know that whatever he taught back then applies pretty well to our own generation ... at least the main message does.

If Jesus thought his generation was confused and spoiled and grabbing at all kinds of things to make them satisfied, he should get a look at us today. (Well, he surely has!)

We spin our wheels trying to find the things that will enhance our lives. We run around like crazy trying to make a living. We find ourselves frustrated and busy and confused and honestly, most people I talk to tell me they are exhausted, they are burned out.

That is not what God intended for us. We have been given a perfect balance for our lives – when all is right, we have work and we have fun, we have sleep, and we have Sabbath ... we have rest.

Does that mean we never should have burdens? Of course not. Everyone has something they carry ... it may be our own or it may be that we have chosen to carry the burdens of others with them. Nevertheless sometimes those burdens get to be too much. They weigh us down, so much so that we feel we can’t go on.

But Jesus offers something better. Jesus says, “Come to me. I’ll show you how to take rest. You can have rest and you can relax in me because I will share the burden with you. Your burden will be lighter because you have opened the door to me, you have let me in, you are willing to trust me. My yoke is easy for you. My burden is light.

So ... how do we do this? How do we really find R & R ... Rest and Relaxation in Jesus? It’s easy to say things like “It’s in God’s hands. God is in control. Everything happens for a reason.”

¹ --John A. Stroman, *Thunder From the Mountain* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1990), 53-55.

It's easy to say, "I'm giving it to God." But we sure are quick to take those burdens back, aren't we? Or, quite possibly, we never really gave them to God in the first place.

But like the story of the King who was seeking the sweetest sound, we probably will find that peace, that rest in Jesus when we finally let ourselves be quiet with him. When we finally take a break from the chaos and just let ourselves "be." Just be with him. Ask him to be with you.

One of the ways of doing that is to come here to worship. I am quite aware that this place – the Church – can be, and often is, a cause for people being exhausted and burnt out. There is work to do as a disciple and there is work and mission to accomplish within and out of the church. It is just a fact that being a part of the Body of Christ – if we are serious about following him and carrying out his mission – we have things to do. Of course, it is easier when every member takes seriously their part in that mission.

But I believe with all my heart that we also desperately need to be able to come and just "be." To be able to sing and praise God with all we have, but also to have time for silent, quiet reflection and prayer, in this place ... as well as at home.

In a few minutes we will come to the table to partake again of the sacred meal that is, in a very spiritual way, a sharing, a partaking of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And this time there will be silence as we are served. No music. And please, no talking. Just sit, holding the bread and reflect on what it means to you. Thank Jesus for his sacrifice, his grace, and for the opportunity to be yoked with him. Thank him for sharing your burden, for making it lighter and bearable.

Ask him to help you to feel it and know it with all your being. Ask him to forgive you for any of the times you have been determined to carry those burdens yourself, instead of trusting him.

And carry that trust and peace, that rest and relaxation out with you to live in you all week long.

"He that has ears ... let him hear."

Amen.