

## UNPLUG

Genesis 2: 1-3; Mark 6: 30-34

Three men died and went to heaven. As they met St. Peter at the gate, he asked them what they had done in their lives. The first one said: “I was the inventor of the automobile air bags—they’ve saved millions of lives.” “Welcome to heaven!” St. Peter said. “You can come in!” Then the second one stepped up and said, “I was the person who thought up the GFI- the Ground Fault Interrupter. It has kept millions of people from getting electrocuted or having their houses burnt down.” “Welcome to heaven!” St. Peter said. “You can come in!” The third man stepped up and said, “I am the man who thought up and started HMOs, the managed health care plans. They have saved people millions of dollars!” “Welcome to heaven,” St. Peter said. “You can come in, but only for three days.”

Clearly the one of the messages of our world for the health care industry, the automotive industry, the food service industry, and more is “time is money.” But then again, all work and no rest can make workers break down; and all rest and no work can cause lower income and malaise on the brain. In spite of hearing the mantra “time is money” throughout our lives, some are honoring God on Sundays by setting aside an hour or two—instead of working or sleeping—to give glory to God being here with your voice, your prayers, and even with your offering. Some have brought a tithe—10%--which some call sacrificial giving. It lets God know that you are aware that heaven originates all good gifts. Others keep their money in their pocket or in a financial portfolio. Still others need their money for car payments, or a mortgage, for rent, or for food. Some say they are too tired to come to a planned hour to honor their Lord, while others have to work, even on Sundays. There are always choices to be made. But gone are the days of blue laws when all the stores are closed on Sunday except drug stores. Now choosing to rest or honor the Sabbath

is a matter of personal choice. Amazingly, some businesses thrive by being closed on Sundays. In the book of Genesis, after the herculean task of creating the world in six days, God included the seventh day in the list of days of the week. It is not a forgotten day or a wasteful day, but a necessary day. “Even God rested” on the seventh day, whether you call it Saturday, or have shifted it to Sundays—the Lord’s Day as the Apostle Paul called it—or you have to create your own “sabbath” according to your schedule. A sabbath from what you normally do matters. We acknowledge that constantly working seems profitable: the more patients a hospital admits, or the more guests who stay at a motel or eat at a restaurant, the more profit can be made. The more cars a manufacturer makes, the more money can be earned. The more clients an attorney sees, the more revenue is generated. But what about the revenue generated by jammed planes or cruise ships or theme parks Is it worth the physical and emotional toll to be part of those? Smart companies learn not to work their employees into the ground. We don’t need overworked pharmacists filling prescriptions incorrectly, or lifeguards dozing off on beach towers, or people falling asleep at the wheel of cars. In the past 25 years, cases of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and fibromyalgia have risen dramatically. In Japan, where productivity seems to be job one, the divorce and mortality rates have soared to be higher than the United States. Societies will crumble under those loads. What can be done?

The title of this message is “unplug.” Some people reach the stage in their life when they are retired and do not do the 9 to 5 anymore. What does “unplugging” look like to them? As my father and mother used to say when I was young enjoying cartoons or westerns all Saturday morning, there are times to turn off the TV and go out and get some fresh air and exercise. How right they were. At any age, turning off a television or a computer for a time of walking, or playing, or gardening rejuvenates the body, mind, and soul. My trainer has honed my body, mind and soul, not just

my body. I pay him in 30-minute training sessions, so at first, I felt the need to fit as much workout in as possible. But he said: “Listen to me. If you work your body too hard for 30 straight minutes, you will break down. Taking breaks between each set is restorative to all parts of you; your muscles stop building up lactic acid, your heart stops pounding, and your lungs exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen more efficiently. Your *time out* between each set does that!” Good advice. When I first came to this congregation, there was a man who worked seven days a week on his business. When I talked to him, he said he never took vacations. I asked him why. He said, “I want to earn as much money as fast as I can so one day I can just retire with enough.” That plan didn’t work out. He ended up having a stroke that was debilitating, and he could no longer work. His wife tried to care for him until he died. Instead of days off or a vacation, he ended up with unpaid medical leave until his death. That is *not* a good plan; that is not God’s plan. And now I myself am dangerously close to violating God’s Law—remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy—by working 7 days a week most weeks. When that happens, “something’s gotta give.” I do not want that to be the way I live continuously. Let’s listen to Jesus’ own lesson to his apostles recorded in Mark chapter 6. “The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all they had done and taught.” Perhaps wanting approval for all they had carried out, *listened to what Jesus didn’t say*. He didn’t say, “well done” hearing the exhausting schedule. He said, “Come with me to a place [where there are no other people] and rest awhile.” I think we often gloss over that instructive passage. We need time for change—from constant work, from strenuous exercise, or from being constant coach potatoes. We need the time to refresh or regroup. In the March 14<sup>th</sup> issue of the Presbyterian Outlook, Pastors Josh Howell and Rob Musick hit the nail on the head:

Today more and more people go shopping, run errands, attend sport events and work on Sundays....As the nation pushes ever closer to a 24/7 pace, our

bodies are not wired to drive this hard. We need rest. Today we strive to achieve machine-like levels of functioning by sleeping less, working more and doing less spiritually replenishing activities—hence we are cranky.... Rather than unplugging on a Sunday, we keep plugged in, all day long. We consume a double-portion of social media, and we watch news to the point of overload. These systems of propaganda and commodification are fueling the “us vs. them” mentality. [p. 20]

Out of the pages of the Old and New Testament we have perhaps the best bit of guidance. Even in the beginning of time there was a day of rest, often called a “Sabbath.” Perhaps you have not yet discovered this passage in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 58:13-14, God is speaking to the people and to the prophet and says, “*If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.*” What a testimony from God about a practice that we often trample. What benefits do we receive when we unplug? Jerry Eisen, once President of the Human Resource Center in Phoenix, Arizona has statistics to prove God knew the results that would come if we did not build in rest. “We have so much day-to-day nitty-gritty that it’s very hard to sit and ponder and come up with something new and innovative. Without [rest], we’ll become a zombie. Some people have already become zombies.” Finally, Professor Emeritus Walter Brueggeman from Columbia Theological Seminary says observing a sabbath is a move of “resistance.” It is “saying NO to the CULTURE OF NOW.” He goes on: “It occurs to me that Sabbath is a school for our desires, an expose and critique of the false desires that focus on idolatry and greed that have immense power for us. When we do not pause for Sabbath, these false desires take power over us. But Sabbath is the chance for self-embrace of our true identity.” [*Sabbath as Resistance*, Louisville:

Westminster/John Knox Press, 2014. P.88.] What a treasure if we find something new about ourselves, by honoring a Sabbath in our lives. Take time to unplug.

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*March 27, 2022*