

Sermon Series: Take Five Take Five: "Out of the Office"
Jonah 3:1-5; 9-10; 4:1-5; Luke 19:1-10; Colossians 1: 3-7
Salem United Methodist Church
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This is the final sermon of the series, "Take Five." We can get so consumed by the busyness of the world that we need to be reminded to take Sabbath Time, thus the title "Take Five." Five being any amount of time to reconnect with God, loved ones, and yourself. Take One: we looked at the rhythm of rest and work. Take two: we assessed our principles and values. Take Three: we gave our jobs both paid and unpaid job of living as an offering to God. Take Four: we named God as our True Boss. Today is Take Five: we will look at "Getting Out of the Office," leaving it behind, or using Sabbath time to get a new perspective on work.

For those who work a Monday through Friday work week, weekends are a time of freedom from the job! Mondays are always hard getting one's head back into the game. One of the first greetings of the day is "How was your weekend?" Then Wednesdays are considered "Hump Day" and we celebrate that there are only two more days in the work week. And then there is TGIF, "Thank God it's Friday!" Have you noticed that people who have little to no faith will still thank God that they got through another week? Fridays is the time to "Get Out of the Office!" Get away from the job! Even for those who love their jobs, we still look forward to time off from the job. Weekends are time to do things we like to do, or chores that need to be done. On the weekends there is no one to tell us what to do or how to do it. We can be our own boss. We have freedom from the job! Or does the job come home with you? Are there things that you need to catch up on? Or concerns that keep you awake at night? Problems that you just can't solve? Worries that pop into your head whenever you try to relax? Perhaps guilt pops up when you reflect on the wrong, even immoral decisions that were made at work last week? You may wonder what could you have said or done differently to influence the decision? Or perhaps you're concerned how an employee or co-worker is being treated? And you are uncomfortable in the role you are playing in it? Or perhaps you are concerned how you are being treated by a boss or co-workers? Perhaps knowing what is on the calendar for next week is making you feel anxious or overwhelmed? You are not alone.

Jonah's been there. The Boss, God, gave him a job to do. Go to the Nineveh and tell them about me. Nineveh! The capital of Assyria! The very name would have made Jonah and the listeners of this allegory or parable cringe. They would have had flashbacks of the long Assyrian domination of Israel. The people of Nineveh were hated and despised. They were the enemy. There was no love lost between these two groups of people. Nineveh was located on the east bank of the Tigris River opposite Mosul. Can you imagine God asking one or all of us to go to Mosul to preach the Gospel today? Instead of heading east, like Jonah we would be heading as far west as we could possibly go! Jonah got as far as Tarshish in Spain. He really got out of the office that day! Later God gave Jonah a "time out" or Sabbath time to think about the job. What went through his head as he rested in the stomach of the big fish? How dare God punish him this way? God must be out of his mind! How could God care about those evil, murderous Assyrians? How could God expect him to go and preach to the enemy? Yep, God was nuts! After Jonah's big fish experience, God calls him the second time to go to Nineveh to "proclaim the message I give you," Jonah goes. He preaches the shortest sermon ever, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Jonah must have been elated to prophesy the destruction of Nineveh. God would take revenge on these horrible, heartless people, but then the unexpected happens. The people of Nineveh repent. They turn to God and even more shocking. God forgives them! Jonah is outraged at God. One can almost hear the cynicism in his voice when he states, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing." How does God respond? God doesn't tell Jonah to get over himself, but invites him to reflect on his anger. Another time out for Jonah! We don't know if Jonah ultimately got on the same page with the Boss, but God lets Jonah know that this is not about Jonah. It's about God's compassion and mercy which is offered to everyone.

We see this compassion is offered again to a little man everyone hated, Zaccheaus. His job was to collect taxes for Rome. He could collect any amount of money from the people and call it tax money. A secret, fixed amount was sent to Rome. Everything else that was collected the tax collectors kept. They got very rich cheating people. Everyone was aware of these practices and despised the tax collectors. Zaccheaus may have wanted a different life, but didn't know how to go about it. The day that Jesus came to town, Zaccheaus got out of the office to see him. Little did he know that it would be a type of Sabbath time, time in which Jesus would spend time with only Zaccheaus-the cheater, the swindler, the schemer. Luke does not share the conversation of that lunch meeting. What happened at Zaccheaus' home is private, just between Jesus and him. What we do know is that after his meeting with Jesus, Zaccheaus was forever changed. We don't know what Zaccheaus despised about his job or his life. We don't know what kept Zaccheaus up at night. We don't know how much he might have wanted to change, but couldn't see how to go about it. Spending time with Jesus transformed Zaccheaus.

Spending time with Jesus can transform our thoughts and hearts, too. This is the purpose of taking Sabbath time, to reconnect with the Holy. We are to be open to the moving of the Spirit in one's life. It's ok to get angry with one's situation or even one's self. God's big enough to handle our anger! Taking the time for Sabbath may, just may help us get a fresh perspective. We just may see where we might be going down the wrong path. Then we just may allow God in Christ with the Holy Spirit to show us how to do the right thing, or affirm us for doing the right thing, or help us see the situation in a different light. Connecting with God's Spirit can help us "think outside the box." God is the most "outside the box" thinker ever. Why not tap into that well of great wisdom? Get "Out of the Office" and get into God's head and heart. This is our salvation! Taking Sabbath time can save us from the demands of perfectionism, from the world's view of success, from hopping aboard the dot-eat-dog train, from the expectations of being all things to all people. God calls us to be who we have been created to be, and that is different for each of us. Yet, each of us is called to the same mission- the same mission Jesus had: to seek and save those who are lost. God sought and saved the people of Nineveh. Jesus sought and saved Zacchaeus.

This week I had a conversation with an office worker. One of her teammates was mean and nasty. She would talk about her co-worker behind her back and do everything to undermine her work. Each day this office worker would go home ranting about what the co-worker had done or said that day. The anger and vengeance that she held in her heart was effecting her health and she despised going to work. Then her husband one evening asked her if she was praying for her co-worker. The statement alone made her temper boil over. She shared this concern with her small group of Christian friends. They, too, suggested that she pray for her co-worker every day on her commute to work, that she use her commute time as Sabbath time, a time to take five and connect with God. A few weeks into praying, she noticed that even when her co-worker was doing something to hurt her, it wasn't bothering her as it used to. A few months later, her co-worker came to her and apologized for her behavior. They talked. Forgiveness was offered and they parted with tears, hugs, and laughter. Now they are working as a team. There are still things that irritate them about each other, but they are willing to acknowledge their differences and respect them. Who was lost here? Who was saved? Keeping Sabbath with God helps us bear fruit in our little corner of the world. This is how God bears fruit in the world, one person at a time.

Yes, work is a four letter word. Work is hard and work is necessary. But God created the rhythm of work and rest. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Whether one takes five minutes a day, five hours a week, five days a month. Take five. When one is annoyed, exhausted, angry, perplexed, filled with doubt, filled with joy, grieving, wanting to run away, and/or believing that everyone else in the world is wrong, take five. Take a little time out for God. Stop your busy day to see that God is alive. God is present, just waiting for us to stop and start a conversation.

Resources: *Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight* by Wayne Muller; Sermon Series: "W**k-Not Just Another Four Letter Word," from UMChurch of the Resurrection; Carmen McRae-Take Five 1961 with Dave Brubeck quartet, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNWSr6N72yQ&list=RDsNWSr6N72yQ>

